THE
RING

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What is FATAL FURY: City of the Wolves?

SNK's beloved *Fatal Fury* series first hit the market in 1991, spearheading the fighting game boom that went on to sweep the industry in the 1990s. *GAROU: MARK OF THE WOLVES* (released in 1999) has for some time served as the franchise's most recent installment. But that is all about to change. Twenty-six years on, a brand-new entry – *FATAL FURY: City of the Wolves* – is set to arrive on the scene! *FATAL FURY: City of the Wolves* features a unique art style, an innovative REV System that supercharges the excitement, plus a host of other battle systems even more robust than before. The game also breathes new life into the series by introducing two distinct control schemes, ensuring the most immersive engagement for newcomers and veterans alike. And those are just some of the new features to be discovered! The streets of South Town are a hotbed of action, wild dreams, and even wilder ambition. Here, at long last, a new legend is about to unfold.

About SNK

Headquartered in Osaka, Japan, SNK develops, publishes and distributes interactive entertainment software on a global scale. Known for such franchises as *THE KING OF FIGHTERS, METAL SLUG* and *SAMURAI SHODOWN,* SNK continues to focus on its rich console game and arcade history.

From Brand Strength to Broadcast Power: stc group at the Global Forefront

The lights go up in Riyadh. Two fighters touch gloves at center ring. Around them, the crowd rises in anticipation. And beyond the arena, in cafes, on screens, and on mobile apps, millions of viewers experience that same moment with precision and clarity. The feed is seamless. The timing is exact. The delivery works.

That level of performance is not an accident. It is powered by infrastructure, scale, and intent. And increasingly, it is made possible by stc group.

In March, Brand Finance, the world's leading independent brand valuation consultancy, ranked stc group as the third strongest telecom brand in the world. This latest recognition builds upon stc's established brand leadership – having previously been named the most valuable telecom brand in the Middle East for five consecutive years and earning the region's strongest brand designation with an exceptional Brand Strength Index (BSI) score of 88.7 out of 100 and AAA brand rating.

These accolades collectively reflect more than just market presence. They demonstrate stc's fundamental strengths: consistent service delivery, strong customer perception, and the ability to maintain seamless connections with users across platforms and borders. These are the essential qualities that define great performance in a digital world - the same characteristics that have shaped boxing's most memorable broadcast moments.

For nearly a century, boxing has pushed the boundaries of how sport is delivered. In 1938, more than 70 million people listened live as Joe Louis faced Max Schmeling. A decade later, Sugar Ray Robinson brought the fight to television, captivating living rooms across America. As formats evolved, so did the viewing experience. Closed-circuit theatres made matches communal. Pay-per-view took boxing global. Digital platforms turned every screen into a front-row seat. Through each phase, broadcasters adapted. They introduced visuals, new angles, faster feeds, and clearer commentary. The expectations kept rising, and so did the demands on the systems behind the scenes.

The goal remained unchanged. The fight needed to reach the audience completely, cleanly, and in real time. Not just the image, but the experience. Not just access, but confidence.

That is the kind of delivery stc group now powers. The brand's journey began with infrastructure, building the backbone of national connectivity across Saudi Arabia. But the brand has continued to grow with purpose, anticipating what individuals, businesses, and institutions need to stay connected and ahead. Today, it operates across the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, enabling everything from cloud services and digital platforms to entertainment and live sport. It is not just a service provider. It is part of how the modern experience is delivered.

The similarities with boxing's broadcast evolution are clear. As boxing becomes increasingly digital and globally distributed, the success of every major event depends not only on the fighters or the spectacle in the ring, but also on the quality of the experience. Viewers expect sharp visuals, uninterrupted streams, and real-time access.

This is where stc group's role is especially critical. Its networks, platforms, and services are part of what brings the moment to life — clearly, completely, and without disruption.

As Saudi Arabia emerges as a major host of global combat sports, that role only becomes more important. Fans today are not just watching. They are sharing, commenting, replaying, and expecting instant, uninterrupted access. The moment cannot just arrive. It has to arrive on time, with quality intact.

That is the environment stc group operates in. Behind every screen is a system. Behind every experience is a performance. And behind boxing's new digital age is a brand that has committed to making each moment count.

From the earliest crackle of radio to today's high-definition streams, the audience has always remembered two things. What they saw. And how it reached them.

That is the standard stc group continues to deliver.

OPENING SHOTS

Welterweight star Jaron Ennis dominated what many thought would be the toughest fight of his pro career, a showdown with fellow unbeaten titleholder Eimantas Stanionis on April 12 in Atlantic City. “Boots” broke the game Lithuanian down in six rounds and made it look easy, unifying the IBF and WBA belts and winning the vacant Ring Magazine championship.

Mark Robinson

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May 2025

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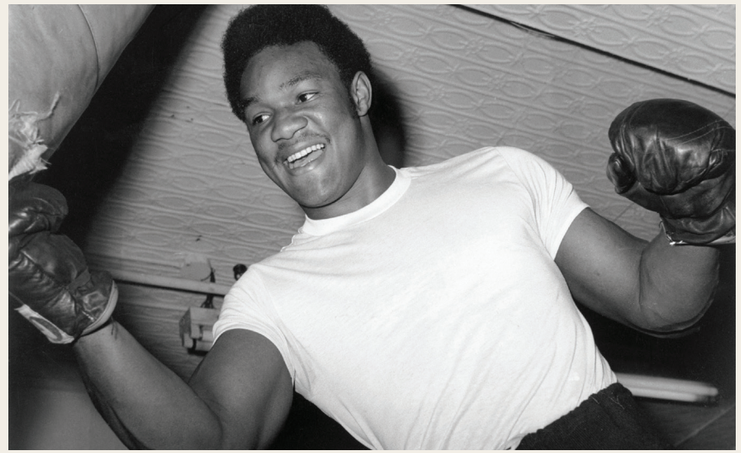
FAREWELL TO FOUR LEGENDS



Former heavyweight champion George Foreman was among the beloved boxing figures who recently passed away.

The third weekend of March was a hard one for longtime boxing fans. In the span of two days, we learned of the passings of George Foreman, Colin Hart and Livingstone Bramble.

Just before this publication went to press, another legend of the sport, decorated amateur and pro trainer Kenny Adams, passed away.

Foreman's death caused the biggest waves, not just within boxing but throughout the world, which comes as no surprise.

Big George, who was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2003, was an Olympic gold medalist who twice won the heavyweight crown (20 years apart) and is considered one of the hardest punchers of all time. However, he transcended boxing.

During his unlikely 10-year comeback – which spanned from 1987 to 1997 – Foreman evolved from a maligned curiosity to a legitimate contender to a popular HBO commentator to the oldest heavyweight champion ever to a celebrity pitchman and, finally, into a bona fide folk hero.

There's nothing I can say about Foreman that hasn't already been said and written since he passed on March 21 at age 76. Thankfully, there was enough time to assign award-winning sportswriter Wallace Matthews to pen an essay on Foreman for this issue (see page 38). Matthews is joined by Ring columnists – and fellow Hall of Famers – Al Bernstein and Randy Gordon, who share their remembrances of the big-punching and big-hearted Texan.

There's more to come in the June issue, which will be dedicated to Big George's extraordinary life and career. The other three legends who have recently left us are equally deserving of proper tributes.

The Voice of Boxing

Colin Hart was a prolific sportswriter who covered eight Olympic Games

(1972-2000) and chronicled great fighters and boxing events during a career that spanned seven decades.

Known as "The Voice of Boxing" in Britain, where he was beloved by his readers and peers, Hart passed away on March 22 at age 89.

Born in London's East End in 1935, his interest in boxing began with his father's stories of great Jewish boxers Ted "Kid" Lewis and Jackie "Kid" Berg, who had emerged from the same tough immigrant area in previous decades.

Hart's journey in journalism began modestly, as a copy boy for a neighborhood newspaper, but he was destined for sportswriting. After joining the staff of the Daily Herald (a national morning paper, later renamed The Sun) in 1958, he quickly advanced from crime reporter to night editor and finally the sports desk, where he began covering boxing in 1964.

Ten years later, Hart was ringside for the "Rumble in the Jungle" in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (then known as Zaire). He was among the few reporters who picked Muhammad Ali to beat Foreman.

Hart frequently traveled to the U.S. to cover major bouts, which included "The Fight of the Century" between Joe Frazier and Ali in 1971 (his first American assignment) and the showdowns between The Four Kings during the 1980s.

Hart enjoyed a rapport with many iconic American boxers, growing so close to Ali that "The Greatest" trusted him to break the story on his Parkinson's disease diagnosis in 1984.

But it was in Britain where Hart was a press row fixture and considered the most informed, prescient and eloquent boxing writer on the beat. For half a century, he covered the standouts: Henry Cooper, Ken Buchanan, Frank Bruno, Nigel Benn, Chris Eubank Sr., Lennox Lewis, Joe Calzaghe, Ricky Hatton, Anthony Joshua and Tyson Fury.

Hart was a respected voice in boxing for 50 years. Bramble's panache injected some excitement into the mid-'80s.

Hart retired as The Sun's full-time boxing correspondent in 2000 but rejoined the staff as a weekly boxing columnist – a role he continued until weeks before his passing.

Hart was the first British scribe to be honored with the Nat Fleischer Award for Excellence in Boxing Journalism by the Boxing Writers Association of America in 2011. He was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame two years later.

The Pitbull

Livingstone Bramble, who passed away on March 22 at age 64, took the boxing world by storm in the mid-1980s when he upset Ray Mancini for the WBA lightweight title and made two defenses of the belt, including a rematch with the popular Ohioan.

Affable and eccentric outside of the ring but rugged and relentless inside it, Bramble made for good copy and fun fights when boxing was still on network TV and 15 rounds was still the distance of most world championship bouts.

He adorned the cover of the September 1984 issue of The Ring shortly after the first Mancini fight. The studio portrait of a grinning Bramble wearing a bright-colored Rasta hat with his pet boa constrictor around his neck and the WBA title draped over his shoulder made even casual fans want to read about the native of St. Kitts and Nevis who fought out of New Jersey.

Bramble owned a collection of pitbull terriers, which may have inspired his nickname, but he lived up to his "Pitbull" ring moniker with his fearsome fighting spirit. During a two-year stretch – 1984-1986 – Bramble defeated (in order) 19-0 up-and-comer Rafael Williams (UD 12), Mancini (TKO 14), the crafty Edwin Curet (UD 10) in a non-title bout, Mancini in the rematch (UD 15) and the WBA's No. 1 contender, Tyrone Crawley (TKO 13), before suffering a second-round KO at the hands of Edwin Rosario.

He remained a contender into the later part of the decade before settling into a role as a serviceable gatekeeper during the first half of the 1990s. From 1990-1994, he tested hot prospects and fellow veterans, including a thriller with Oba Carr (L-SD 10) that the undefeated youngster was lucky to win, future IBF 140-pound titleholder Charles Murray (L-UD 10), Roger Mayweather (L-DQ 5) and future Hall of Famers Kostya Tszyu (L-UD 10) and Buddy McGirt (L-UD 12).

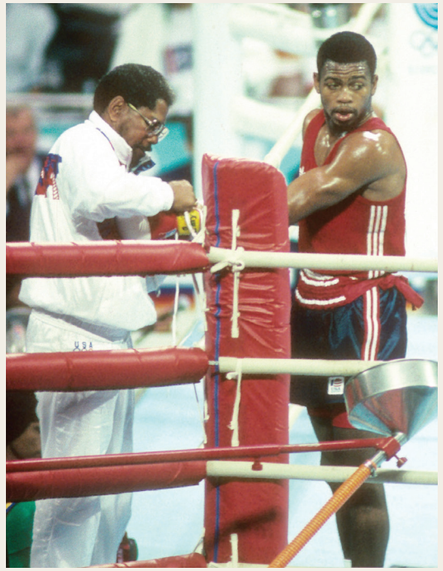
The Coach

The passing of Kenny Adams barely made news outside of boxing, and even within the sport it was seemingly noted only by his former fighters, fellow trainers, industry folks and longtime media members who knew him.

Adams, who died on April 7 at age 84, was low-key compared to other notable trainers, but those who had the honor of working with him or the pleasure of covering his extraordinary career can attest that he was every bit the boxing sage as celebrated gurus of the past, from Ray Arcel to Angelo Dundee and Emanuel Steward.

Make no mistake: Adams, who was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2024, is one of the greatest trainers of the modern era.

A Vietnam veteran and career military man, Adams elevated the U.S. Army's boxing team to international success before joining USA Boxing to serve as assistant coach for the legendary 1984 U.S. Olympic squad. Adams was promoted to head coach of the ultra-talented 1988 U.S. Olympic team (the first African American to hold that position), which included Roy Jones Jr., Riddick Bowe, Ray Mercer, Michael Carbajal, Kennedy McKinney and Andrew Maynard.



Adams attends to a young Roy Jones Jr. during the 1988 Olympic Games.

Adams followed those medalists into the professional ranks, where he would go on to work with at least 25 world titleholders, including McKinney, Mercer, Michael Nunn, Johnny Tapia, Nonito Donaire, Diego Corrales, Cory Spinks, Jorge Linares, Edwin Valero, Vince Phillips, Frankie Liles, Al Cole, Freddie Norwood, Rene Jacquot, Charles Murray, Samuel Peter, Michael Bentt, Ruslan Chagaev, Eddie Cook and Dee-jay Kriel.

When I met Adams 30 years ago, he had already helped four fighters – Jacquot, Cook, McKinney and Liles – win world titles. I approached him (as a fan; I was not yet media) shortly after Phillips had scored a first-round KO at The Forum in Inglewood, California.

Adams was born in Springfield, Missouri, where I spent my formative years, so we had an instant bond and familiarity, but I was still surprised by his candor once we started talking.

"Vince is coming along nicely," he told me. "If I can keep him active and away from the dope man, I think he can win a world title by the end of next year. That's why I've got him and Kennedy training up in Big Bear [California], to keep 'em away from drugs. I swear, if I see that hippie dealer and his van anywhere near our gym, I'll strangle him."

Adams had a temper. It almost cost him the '88 Olympic coaching gig when he attempted to strangle a USA Boxing controller for raising his voice at him. However, when that fire was focused on instilling discipline and technique into willing boxing pupils, it made Adams an elite coach and teacher.

Many of his fighters needed the no-nonsense drill sergeant approach. Adams took on the hard cases and the head cases – fighters who struggled with addiction like McKinney and Phillips, and those who were troubled and more than a bit "touched," like Norwood and Valero.

Adams believed in his fighters and they delivered for their coach, often against all odds.

Jacquot, his first world titleholder, scored The Ring's 1989 Upset of the Year by outpointing Donald Curry. Cook was unknown when he knocked out heavily favored Israel Contreras for the WBA bantamweight title in 1992. Phillips earned The Ring's 1997 Upset of the Year and the IBF junior welterweight title when he shocked Kostya Tszyu. The same year, McKinney became a two-division champ with an up-from-the-canvas KO of Junior Jones.

Norwood got the better of Juan Manuel Marquez in a WBA featherweight title defense in 1999.

Truth be told, Adams had IBHOF credentials 25 years before he got in. He will be missed.

Hart: Jeff Spicer; Adams: John Iacono

RIDERS ON THE STORM

By Al Bernstein

The man with famously heavy hands had a soft spot for horses.

On March 20, I received a residual check for the voiceovers I did for the movie *Big George Foreman*. As I looked at it, I thought about the fact that I had not talked to George in a while and wrote a note on my calendar to reach out to him the next day. On the next day, George died. Irony does not even cover it. That check was the final gift of many related to him that I received in my life.

Much has been said and written about George since his passing. Every person who knew him, covered him or even admired him from afar has something to add to chronicling his unique life. And you need many voices for that, because his journey was so varied and jam-packed with important events and moments that one perspective doesn't do it justice.

George's professional life is like a Broadway play. It had act one, followed by an intermission (a long one), and then act two. Some people in boxing and the media were in George's personal orbit for both acts. Many, like me, watched the first act as a spectator before joining the supporting cast for act two. The intermission provided time for personal growth that made the professional redemption and reinvention of George possible. He told me on several occasions that the lessons he learned while out of the spotlight fueled his future accomplishments.

The details of his amazing story have been well-chronicled on video, in print and in the digital world, but his personal strengths sometimes get lost in the shuffle. After his death, we have heard personal stories that buttress those attributes. Let me add to that.

There was never anything I requested from George that he didn't do. I asked him to write the foreword for my book and he produced it in all of three days. He laughed and told me, "Hey, I didn't type it, but I DID dictate it." I did a show called "Boxing By The Book" at the Caesars Palace Race and Sports Book where I sang some specialty numbers, showed boxing videos and interviewed boxers. George got wind of it and volunteered to be a guest. Over 1,000 people showed up and crowded into the space to see him – I think his appearance got me renewed for another six months. I told George and thanked him. He just winked – he knew he was doing me a solid.

"You know, Mike Tyson is a thoroughbred and I'm just an old gaited horse that walks and trots well, but if I get him in the ring, I'll beat him."

George and I had many phone calls about our shared passion: horses. We both were devoted riders. George rode and raised gaited horses. I rode mostly quarter horses, and that breed is not naturally a gaited horse. So, I learned from George about gaited breeds that he had on his ranch in Marshall, Texas. I was, however, able to provide some equestrian knowledge to George, because he didn't do much of the rodeo event known as team penning, and I did. So I shared my knowledge on that sport with him. Demonstrating his quick wit, he once chuckled and said to me, "You know, I never thought anyone with a last name like Bernstein would ever give me tips on team penning."

On a *Big Fights Boxing Hour* show on ESPN, I delivered these words about him: "Before George Foreman was a personality, he was a puncher. Before he was a sportscaster, he was a puncher. And before he was a product pitchman, he was a puncher. Being a big puncher made all that possible." Indeed, the young Foreman was all about raw power as much as any boxer we might remember. The singularity of this persona in the ring was mesmerizing and successful, but it ultimately led to his downfall in act one.

The older, wiser, patient and more nuanced George that I covered and announced in act two was a delightful surprise and revelation to fans and pundits. An amazing fact is that the older, heavier Foreman was just as durable physically and more so mentally than the younger version. He survived any big punch landed and was undaunted by setbacks within fights or overall. He overcame adversity in a way that sometimes eluded him in his younger years.

Two weeks before he fought Michael Moorer for the heavyweight title, I interviewed him for ESPN. During that interview, of course, he said he would win by knockout. Most people were skeptical of that at the time. After the interview, we had lunch. At one point, he leaned across the table, looked at me intently and said, "What I told you in the interview, I want you to know I really believe it. He's probably gonna beat me up some, but I tell you what: I'll get to him eventually and I WILL knock him out." In every detail, that turned out to be an accurate description of the match.

When Foreman started his comeback, Mike Tyson was the champion and George stated his goal was to win the title. Most folks thought it would be suicide for him to fight Tyson. During one of our horse breed-related conversations, thoroughbreds came up because my horse at the time was part thoroughbred. Out of the blue, George said, "You know, Mike Tyson is a thoroughbred and I'm just an old gaited horse that walks and trots well, but if I get him in the ring, I'll beat him." I didn't believe that then or for a while after, but the more George repeated it to me, the more I came to believe it. He explained he would fight him like he did Joe Frazier, pushing him off to disrupt his rhythm, tying him up if he did get inside and waiting for his time to land a big counter uppercut or right hand that would change the fight. If I thought I was crazy to believe him, well, I felt less crazy when the great trainer, manager and savant-like broadcaster Gil Clancy told me that he agreed with George on this one.

We will never know if George would have achieved that goal of beating Tyson as he did so many others. We do know he ended up winning the world title again, and he left very little undone in his life. Perhaps the great Mae West said it best: "You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough." George did it right.

Ironically, around the time of George's death and the flood of remembrances about him, there came the release of a definitive work to help us honor the memory of one of George's great contemporaries. A brilliant film called *I Am Joe Frazier* was released on The CW Network, and it demands the attention of boxing fans. The triumvirate of Ali, Frazier and Foreman created boxing folklore in the 1960s and '70s. The documenting of Frazier's amazing journey has been done mostly through the prism of his rivalry with Ali… until now. This remarkable film by Pete McCormack provides us with a vivid, accurate and entertaining retelling of the Frazier story. I assure you: It will surprise and illuminate you, no matter what you think you already know about Joe. This film fulfills a mission that is decades overdue. It is a piece of art that needed to be made. RING

Chris Trotman

My First Time

by Kelly Pavlik

As told to Anson Wainwright

Kelly Pavlik took his time reaching the top – seven years, to be precise – but when the big occasion came, he wasn't found wanting. • As the underdog against middleweight champion Jermain Taylor in 2007, Pavlik climbed off the canvas in a near-disastrous second round and bounced back to score a come-from-behind seventh-round knockout. • He outpointed Taylor (UD 12) in a non-title rematch and proceeded to make three successful defenses of his Ring, WBC and WBO belts.

THE FIRST TIME I LACED UP GLOVES

"I grew up in the inner city of Youngstown [Ohio] and had a buddy that lived across the street, and his dad was much older. He had the old-World War II gloves; we put on those old-school '30s and '40s gloves.

"We put a little kitchen timer outside – that was our bell – and beat the shit out of each other in the backyard. We created our own [characters] and stuff like that. That was the first time putting on gloves.

"I would go home – I was 8, 9 years old – my face would be red or I'd have a little bit of blood and would have to think of a good excuse, because if I told my parents I was getting beat up by my older brothers or friend, they'd be pretty mad.

"That was an experience with boxing that got me really into it.

"The first time I went to the gym and sparred, I got my butt whooped. My parents were happy because they thought I was going to quit, because they didn't want me boxing. I came home from school and had my gym bag ready, and my dad was like, 'Where are you going?' And I was like, 'We're going back to the gym so I can kick that kid's ass.' And that was kind of where I knew boxing was a sport.

"Those were the first couple of times I put gloves on, and I loved it."

MY FIRST AMATEUR FIGHT

"I remember that probably more than any fight.

"We have a tournament here in Ohio – it's actually pretty big. It's a non-ranking tournament. It's called the Ohio State Fair, down in Columbus, and you get a lot of kids from all over the country who fight in that.

"This kid had 30 or 40 amateur fights. He fought in the Junior Olympics and did very well. I think he made it to the final or won it. He had a lot of experience, and it was my very first amateur fight.

"Everybody was going, 'This is a learning experience for Kelly,' not thinking I would win.

"I literally just turned 12. I went in there and I put it on this kid. I gave him such a whooping.

"I had real big feet when I was a kid, tall for my weight. I was beating him up so bad, I started doing the Ali shuffle and tripped and almost went down because of my big feet.

"I won my very first fight. It was on points. That was a regular club show. I know a lot of people were coming up to me that wasn't from my area. They were like, 'Wow, man, good fight.' I don't think they knew I didn't have no fights and that was my first one.

"My trainer and the guys on my team – 'cause we took about seven of us down – they were all like, 'Dude, good job. No way that was your first fight!' I was like, 'I've been training here. You were here when I got here.'

"It was cool. It was definitely a memorable fight, not because it was my first fight but just the way it played out."

MY FIRST PROFESSIONAL FIGHT

JUNE 16, 2000
OPPONENT: ERIC BENITO 'T ZAND
VENUE: FANTASY SPRINGS CASINO, INDIO, CALIFORNIA

"I was definitely nervous for that one. I signed the contract with Top Rank, and then Cameron Dunkin, who was my agent, and probably two weeks before the fight, [Dunkin] said, 'I think you guys are going to be on TV.' I'm like, 'What?' He said, 'You're going to be on ESPN.' And a lot changed in the course leading up to that. You're nervous. You're anxious. You're preparing for your pro debut, first fight without headgear, fighting outside in 110 degree weather and also wondering if you're going to get on TV, because at 18 years old, that's everything. You're going to go out and perform if it's TV cameras or not. I didn't know [if I would be on the broadcast] all the way up to the fight.

Pavlik secured his shot at the middleweight throne with an impressive stoppage of Edison Miranda in 2007.

Joe Murphy

"You want to be impressive. You just got a signing bonus from your promotional company. You've got all these people hyping you up, your hometown; your local newspaper is blasting you – some of the outlets which is a little different than how it is today. You want to be impressive. In your head, you're like, 'I've got to be impressive.' Secondly, you don't know much on who you're fighting. Even then (the year 2000), there was no YouTube.

"You know you're going to win. I would say 70, 80 percent [of you] knows you're going to win, hands down. Ten percent is like, 'I've got to be impressive. I've got to show people. I've got to do this. I've got to do that.' And then you've got that small percentage that sticks to the back of your head that's like, 'I've got to win, or I could lose this fight – and not only lose but get hurt.' That usually played on my mind too. It's pro boxing. 'I could get knocked out. The worst could happen.' There's a lot that goes on in your head before a fight. I was still confident: You're coming in off a great amateur run; you're coming out of the Olympic Trials; you're signed with the promotional company; you're one of the top dogs. But you do and should have that doubt. It's part of the adrenaline that keeps you going.

"Once you get in there, you're nervous, but you have a game plan. You have some experience from the amateurs, but it's a rude awakening. It's a whole different atmosphere. Everything was moving quick. I adapted quick. Once that bell rings, it's fight time. Pro debut is more of an instinct at that point, and you're fighting off what you know how to do for the past handful of years.

"I fought a kid by the name of [Eric] Benito ' t Zand, trained by one of [Mike] Tyson's old trainers, and he was short and stocky – built just like Tyson, very muscular – and I was like, 'Damn, your first fight without headgear.' The fight went quick, but it was a good fight. I found my rhythm. After the first minute of the round, I started opening up and the natural ability made it different, and I knocked him out in the third round.

"We just hung out in the room, [with] my trainers, had some beers. I was excited and happy. You've come to find out you were on TV. You're on top of the world. Top Rank flew us out the next morning, so there was no partying. It was only the pro debut. You've got to move on from there and see what else is out there, get ready for the next one. I believe I actually fought the next month." RING

MY PERFECT PUNCH

JANUARY 27, 2007
OPPONENT: JOSE LUIS ZERTUCHE

"A lot of people talk about my right hand: 'Oh, that lethal right hand.' But I actually had a sneaky, brutal left hook, because I'm ambidextrous. Most of my brutal knockouts were with my straight right that I was setting up – I would set off the left. [The Jose Luis] Zertuche [knockout] is one they're constantly showing highlights of. The straight right was one that put people to sleep.

"I just felt like I got a lot of torque on the right hand, and it was comfortable for me. The right hand, I had the range down perfect, the perfect setup for the right hand, and I think that helped a lot.

"I used to throw my jab with the glove open and my hand pointing down. It was kind of like that split-second pause; a lot happens in a split second in boxing. So I would kind of throw my jab out and leave my glove down a little bit and bring the right hand over it. Or like Zertuche, I would get them to keep their hands in a certain spot. If you watch, it was a one-three-two: a jab, left hook, [right hand,] but on the left hook, I didn't throw it like a left hook. I was almost like trying to pat him on the side of the head to keep his hands there so I could fire a right hand straight down the middle, and caught him right on the chin. I did that a lot.

"He had a translator, and he mentioned something in Spanish. He looked at me and smiled, was talking to the translator, and he patted the translator on the shoulder and the translator pointed to his right hand and said, 'Geez, never been hit like that.' It's up there as one of the more brutal knockouts within that decade."

Naoki Fukuda

A RARE SIGHTING

Wherever he fights, The Monster brings a heavy chest of treasure with him.

By Steve Kim

By the time you've cracked open this edition of The Ring Magazine, Naoya Inoue will likely have another victory on his resume, and probably another KO, at the expense of Ramon Cardenas. Coming into their May 4 matchup, oddsmakers listed the undisputed junior featherweight champion as a 50-to-1 favorite.

So yeah, "The Monster" from Japan wasn't exactly facing Godzilla here.

But what made this date notable is that it marked Inoue's return to America after a four-year gap. This particular event, which was promoted by Top Rank, was set to take place at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas. It wasn't Inoue's first appearance in the United States, but there is a chance that it was the last opportunity for U.S.-based fans to see him live.

While most foreign boxers come to America for the money, Inoue, who regularly scores eight-figure paydays in his home country, most likely had to make some concessions to make this trip to the U.S. a reality.

"I mean, it's not a gimme," admitted Bob Arum, the founder of Top Rank. "But MGM really stood up to the plate and bought a block: $2.5 million worth of tickets for its customers. So we were able to piece it together. But yeah, [Inoue] makes a lot of money in Japan, and so obviously we had to come close or match it to make it palatable for him to fight in the United States."

The Cardenas fight will have been Inoue's fourth outing in the U.S. His first was as a supporting bout on the inaugural "SuperFly" series on HBO in 2017, when he stopped Antonio Nieves in six rounds at the StubHub Center (now Dignity Health Sports Park) in

Carson, California. He then had five fights overseas and won the World Boxing Super Series bantamweight tournament in 2019, after which he signed to a co-promotional deal with Top Rank.

His debut under the Top Rank banner was set to be at the Mandalay Bay in 2020 versus John Riel Casimero, a bantamweight unification bout at the time. Unfortunately, this was one of the first fight cards that was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It could've done huge numbers at the box office, according to many insiders.

"I can't remember a fight where I received so many calls from international marketing divisions from different casinos for that ticket," Jim Boone, a leading ticket broker, told The Ring. "It was absolutely incredible. The funny thing was everyone would call and pronounce Inoue's name incorrectly. I heard multiple ways of pronouncing his name. It was the real deal. It had a big-fight feel to it."

In an effort to clear up the pronunciation of Naoya's last name, the easy way is "ee-no-way," but the more proper way has four syllables and sounds like "ee-noh-oo-ay."

Eventually, Inoue would face Jason Moloney in the Top Rank "Bubble" in October 2020 and then Michael Dasmarinas at the small room inside the Virgin Hotels Las Vegas the following year. At that time, Inoue was a highly respected boxer with an avid following among the hardcore denizens of the sport, but he had yet to break into the mainstream consciousness outside of Japan.

A lot has taken place since then. Inoue not only became both the undisputed bantamweight and junior featherweight champion in the subsequent years, but he is now considered to be among the finest pound-for-pound fighters in the world, if not

"He had a dream, that's what he told me, of fighting on a big, big stage ..."

No. 1. No longer is he a curiosity from "The Land of the Rising Sun." Inoue has an international profile among boxing fans and is now a bona fide icon in his home country.

There was a growing chorus from certain fans that for Inoue to really prove himself, he had to fight on American soil. Never mind that he had already done so a few times. The reality is that he didn't have to, but he wanted to return to the States – this time with the full capability of drawing a much bigger audience.

"Very much so," confirmed Arum. "He had a dream, that's what he told me, of fighting on a big, big stage, particularly in Las Vegas. So he's going to do that big fight at the T-Mobile, which is the largest indoor arena in Vegas."

But you do wish he'd had stiffer opposition on May 4. To many fans, Inoue facing Cardenas was akin to Shohei Ohtani hitting off a batting tee. Who knows? Maybe something unlikely happened that evening – and yeah, it would make this column a bit farcical – but it's doubtful. To put this into perspective, a Cardenas victory would be a bigger upset than Buster Douglas beating Mike Tyson.

Regardless, this will have been a chance – perhaps the last one – for American fans to see a truly special prizefighter while still in his prime. Hey, beggars can't be choosers, right? There are plans for Inoue to face former unified 122-pound titleholder Murodjon Akhmadaliev and WBA featherweight beltholder Nick Ball later in 2025, with locales such as Japan and Saudi Arabia being mentioned.

However, Arum isn't convinced that this is Inoue's last dance in America.

"He's a relatively young man, and he will be fighting at 122 for the next year," said Arum. "Then once he gets to 126, we expect we'll be able to bring him back to the United States, because we have so many 126-pound champions."

Always thinking ahead, the 93-year-old Hall of Famer put WBO featherweight titleholder Rafael Espinoza in the May 4 co-feature, thus providing an ESPN-televised foundation for a possible matchup with The Monster.

"That's why he's on the card." RING

Promoter Bob Arum expects more stateside visits from Inoue.

Naoki Fukuda

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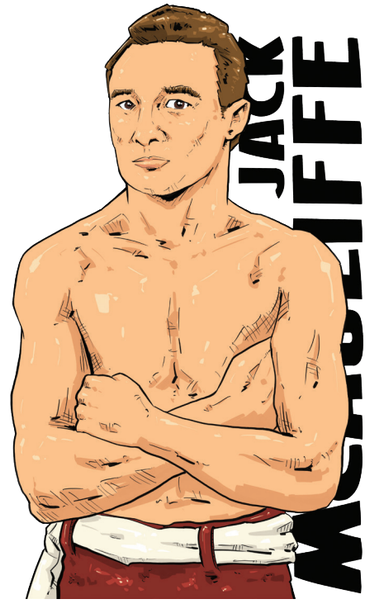
BY THE NUMBERS:

Jack McAuliffe

by Don Stradley • Illustration by KronkAAArt

When referee Billy Roche penned an appreciation for Jack McAuliffe (1866-1937), he appeared to be writing about a flamboyant Broadway actor greeting the masses, a refined dandy who was as much consumed by fashion as fisticuffs. “He would walk across the ring with a lordly air,” Roche wrote, “and there was something royal in his gesture as he threw off his robe and acknowledged the plaudits of the crowd.” Known as “The Napoleon of the Ring,” McAuliffe was among the first to embrace the Marquess of Queensberry Rules. Here’s his story by the numbers.



0 Losses »

McAuliffe’s overall record differs according to the source, with some putting it at 27-0-10 with 19 knockouts, but what everyone agrees on is that he is one of the few fighters to retire without a loss. For many years, that was his calling card. Born in Cork, Ireland, McAuliffe came to America as a boy, living first in Bangor, Maine, before settling in Brooklyn, New York. His boxing career spanned from the gaslit era of the 1880s, when championship fights were held in secret to avoid police intervention, to the late 1890s, when boxing became mass entertainment and was presented in chic new athletic clubs. Along with his official bouts, he took part in dozens of exhibitions around the country.

7 Years as Lightweight Champion »

McAuliffe proclaimed himself the lightweight champion starting in 1885, but it wasn’t until January 1887, with a 28th-round KO of Harry Gilmore in Lawrence, Massachusetts, that he was generally regarded as the division’s best man. He maintained his standing until November 1894, when he broke his wrist during a draw with Owen Ziegler in Brooklyn and relinquished the belt due to the injury shortly thereafter.

74 Rounds with Jem Carney »

On November 16, 1887, in a secluded stable that was part of the Atlantic Hotel at Revere Beach near Boston, McAuliffe and Carney fought for five hours. Blankets were placed over the windows to keep the affair private, while an invited audience of no more than 50 men settled in to witness Carney, the top lightweight of England, challenge McAuliffe, the top lightweight of America. It was a bout that had taken months to make, a sort of superfight of the post-Civil War era, for a purse of $4,500.

Fighting under the Queensberry rules with skin-tight yellow gloves, McAuliffe got out to an early lead. By the 12th, the Boston Globe reported that Carney’s nose was “split across the bridge” and that his forehead “began to bulge out in great disproportion.” Yet Carney found a second wind, and then a third. As the fight dragged on for the next 50 rounds, it seemed neither man could gain an edge for long. At one point, McAuliffe actually fell after slipping on Carney’s blood. In the 74th, as the clock neared 6 a.m., Carney knocked McAuliffe through the ropes, causing that side of the ring to collapse. With their man down, McAuliffe’s crew created a diversion by storming the ring. Referee Frank Stevenson of New York, fearing the police might arrive at any moment, declared the fight over. There was no winner.

The fight was supposed to continue at another date to decide a victor, but it went into the history books as a draw. With a winner undeclared, Carney and McAuliffe insulted each other for years. McAuliffe called Carney a dirty fighter who should’ve been disqualified. In turn, Carney’s backers said the fight was stopped by armed gamblers who had bet on McAuliffe and felt he was on the verge of losing. Carney explained to The Sun, “One bloke put a gun to my head and said he’d blow my brains out if I didn’t get out.”

1 Controversial Bout with Young Griffo »

After their 10-round battle at Coney Island’s Seaside Athletic Club in 1894, most of the 6,200 in attendance felt Australia’s Griffo had outboxed McAuliffe from the first gong to Round 7. Granted, McAuliffe put on a fierce rally over the last three rounds, but it certainly appeared a new lightweight champion was about to be anointed. To the surprise of the onlookers, referee Maxie Moore awarded the bout to McAuliffe. Though McAuliffe opened a bottle of wine in the ring for a victory celebration, the crowd objected. According to a ringside report, “The shout for Griffo went from one end of the amphitheater to the other.”

Moore explained that he’d kept a clicker in each hand, counting the punches from each man. McAuliffe had landed 137 clean punches to Griffo’s 123. Moore also tallied the fight in rounds this way: McAuliffe four, Griffo three and three rounds even. Griffo did a lot of slapping and flailing, Moore said, while McAuliffe’s blows were harder. The boxing business was still in its pioneer era, but the argument was already on about which blows should count for more.

1 Carnival of Champions »

In September of 1892, with the famous John L. Sullivan-James J. Corbett fight as the highlight, the Olympic Club of New Orleans hosted a three-night program billed as “The Carnival of Champions.” One night saw featherweight champion George Dixon stop challenger Jack Skelly in eight, while another saw McAuliffe score a 15th-round KO of Billy Myer, who had previously held McAuliffe to a 64-round draw in Indiana. McAuliffe also served as Sullivan’s chief cornerman during the Corbett fight, which ended with Sullivan knocked out in the 21st. “It was pitiful,” McAuliffe said, “and taught me a lesson that made me avoid fighting that one fight too many when I found myself slipping.”

2 Jack Dempseys on his Resume »

How many fighters could say they’d traded blows with both the 1880s Dempsey, known as “The Nonpareil,” and the later Dempsey who became one of the premier sports figures of the 20th century? Indeed, McAuliffe could. He boxed many exhibitions with the first Dempsey, the final being in 1895 in Brooklyn. Sources report that sometime around 1919, McAuliffe, now in his 50s, boxed an exhibition with the second Dempsey in New Jersey. Moreover, he’d also sparred with Georges Carpentier, so when the Dempsey-Carpentier bout was being made, McAuliffe monetized his experience with a vaudeville engagement, billing himself as having been in the ring with both Dempsey and Carpentier.

27 Years of Bitterness »

McAuliffe and Carney remained bitter enemies after their 1887 draw, but in 1914 they put aside their differences and met in London for a boxing exhibition. According to the Birmingham Evening Mail, 48-year-old McAuliffe was his usual splendid self as he arrived for the event “in immaculate evening dress with a white waistcoat and a flower in his buttonhole.” The sparring was set for three one-minute rounds, but a lot of time had passed since their epic battle in Revere. “McAuliffe was the quicker of the two,” reported the Evening Mail, “and he kept his opponent dancing about all over the ring. Nothing much in the way of blows was landed, but the pace was too hot for Carney, who retired at the end of the second round.” The London Times regarded the sight of the two aging geezers as “tragic,” but McAuliffe probably returned to America and, with his customary bravado, declared he’d outlasted Carney and was still undefeated.

Ring Ratings Analysis

Through fights of April 5, 2025 • By Brian Harty

Naoki Fukuda

Kenshiro Teraji (right) takes it to Seigo Yuri Akui en route to a dramatic 12th-round stoppage victory.

POUND FOR POUND: After coming out on the winning side of 11½ rounds of trench civil warfare with countryman Seigo Yuri Akui, Kenshiro Teraji was nominated to replace David Benavidez at No. 10 on the list. It wasn't without some trepidation, as the quality of Benavidez's ongoing run at 168 and now 175 pounds inspired several members of the ratings panel to defend his P4P credentials. An alternative proposal was to drop the next man up the list instead: No. 9-rated Devin Haney. He's a complicated case, however. Haney fought in April 2024 and dropped a majority decision to Ryan Garcia, but that result was nullified after Garcia tested positive for a banned performance-enhancer. So while Haney's last official win was a unanimous decision over Regis Prograis all the way back in December 2023, he hasn't officially lost since then, either, and the Garcia fight kept him busy enough to avoid being dropped for a year without action. He'll be back in the ring facing Jose Ramirez as part of the Times Square day of reckoning on May 2 (with old pal Garcia in the main event), so Haney will be under the microscope soon enough. For the time being, Benavidez is out.

HEAVYWEIGHT: It won't make anyone's list of candidates for Performance of the Year, but Filip Hrgovic's unanimous decision victory over Joe Joyce was enough for a promotion. Voting to favor the simple equation of "W > L," the panel moved the Croatian from No. 8 to No. 6, placing him above Zhilei Zhang and Martin Bakole, who both lost in their most recent fights.

CRUISERWEIGHT: Arsen Goulamirian (No. 5 last month) triggered the inactivity trapdoor by not having a fight since his transatlantic letdown against Gilberto Ramirez in March 2024. Once the Frenchman had dropped off the list, undefeated Swede Robin Sirwan Safar moved in at No. 10.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT: Joeshon James was at his best when boxing from a distance in his twice-postponed matchup with Lester Martinez, but he strayed into unsafe territory once it was clear that the quicker Guatemalan couldn't be defeated by long jabs alone. Martinez could overcome the arm-length disparity with his quicker feet, but he was even better at close quarters when mixing in some Y-axis attacks, scoring with uppercuts and then completely surprising James with an overhand right that dropped the Californian into what seemed like a definitive heap at the end of Round 3. James surprisingly beat the count and made it to the fourth, but his already-compromised legs were entirely rubberized when he absorbed another flush right uppercut followed by a pair of overhand finishers about 40 seconds into the round. Martinez broke into the ratings at No. 10 as a result of the impressive win, replacing Erik Bazinyan.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT: Jesus Ramos got a bump from No. 9 to No. 8 after his seventh-round stoppage of Guido Schramm, who was pinned on the ropes when a heavy left hook left him too damaged to fend off further punches from the 24-year-old Arizonan. This was the third-straight TKO win for Ramos since his lone defeat against Erickson Lubin in September 2023.

WELTERWEIGHT: Brian Norman Jr. was promoted from No. 5 to No. 3 after a brief but methodical beatdown of Derrieck Cuevas, who failed to come up with a convincing response when asked if he wanted to continue after getting floored in the third round.

While Norman was climbing to his new perch, he had to pass by No. 4-rated David Avanesyan, which prompted one panelist to ask why Avanesyan was there to be passed in the first place. Starting in December 2022, he has fought four times: Two were knockout losses to Terence Crawford and Jaron Ennis, and the other two were stoppage wins against men with a combined record of 22-58-3 at the time. Not "Top 5" stuff, really. The panelist suggested lowering Avanesyan to No. 10 or ousting him entirely.

That suggestion was embraced by some, but opposition from another panel member rekindled a tricky debate: Should changes to the ratings be allowed outside of the normal cycle of weekly events? Put another way: Are we allowed to make corrections?

It last came up when a ratings discussion veered toward placing Artur Beterbiev above Dmitry Bivol on the pound-for-pound list but below him on the light heavyweight list – something that didn't really make sense for two guys who only fight at one weight. Before that, the panel debated whether Sunny Edwards vs. Jesse Rodriguez – a fight that everybody agreed should crown a flyweight king – should be for the vacant Ring championship even though they were ranked No. 1 and No. 4, respectively, and the rules state that a vacancy can only be filled by No. 1 facing No. 2 (and sometimes No. 3). In both cases, the standings were the result of small decisions that became glaring anomalies over time.

Back to Avanesyan: He wasn't punished too much for losing to a pound-for-pound prodigy in Crawford. His loss to Ennis was also forgivable in itself, but a look back at the ratings discussion shows that the debate that week was focused on whether to bring the legendary Roman Gonzalez back into the ratings after beating Rober Barrera, a win of questionable significance, and Avanesyan's loss didn't get much attention. Add in the two stay-busy fights that kept Avanesyan in the mix and the attrition that occurs when others exit the list, and you end up with a guy in the top 5 who looks strange being there.

The first panel member argued that Avanesyan's position was an obvious mistake that should be corrected. The opposing panel member favored strict adherence to the process, saying that the alternative "lacks rigor and can easily lead people down the road to playing favorites/punishing others. […] The panel needs to avoid arbitrary moves like this in favor of a rigorous and consistent approach." The counter was that the proposal was not arbitrary; it was based on facts. And favoritism is put in check – in theory, at least – by the votes of other members. Panelist No. 2, whose hardline position had also found support, wouldn't budge, saying these things need to work themselves out by the same process that created them.

The panel was faced with approaching the situation as a court approaches the law: The rules state that "The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made." Can this be interpreted as permission to make changes at any time? Does rigor exist only in staying within the weekly cycle, or is continuous monitoring and tweaking its own form of rigor? When it comes to a list based on expertise, is it more important to favor process over consensus?

It's an ongoing debate. Another panelist offered this: "Strict rules and consistency are important and essential, and we should continue to do so. However, when you find a ranking that is off the mark like this one, it seems right to admit your mistake and correct it." In this case, Avanesyan was removed and Rohan Polanco entered at No. 10.

(And a quick note to Jaron Ennis and his fans: We barely had time to slap the Opening Shot onto this magazine as it passed by on its way to the printer, so we'll get back to that performance next time. Look for a feature in the June issue.)

FEATHERWEIGHT: Rey Vargas (No. 5) last fought to a draw against Nick Ball in March 2024 and had nothing scheduled at press time, so the former two-division titleholder from Mexico was removed for inactivity. Arriving at No. 10 to pick up the slack was undefeated Californian Omar Trinidad. The rock-solid Ball, meanwhile, stayed put at No. 3 after beating TJ Doheny, whose corner pulled the plug in the 10th to save their fighter from two more rounds of abuse from the young WBA titleholder.

Bruce Carrington (No. 8 last month) used a combo straight out of a mitt drill to floor Enrique Vivas in Round 2 – uppercut, dip to avoid the counter hook that whiffs overhead, left to the body, right to the head – but you rarely see it executed so perfectly during a real fight. After referee Raul Caiz Jr. put an end to the clinic in the next round, "Shu Shu" got a one-spot promotion as payment for his teaching services.

FLYWEIGHT: Teraji (No. 2 last month) and Akui (No. 3) gave fans a fascinating brawl in mid-March, blending will and skill as they angled for openings to chop at each other with unwavering tenacity in the center of the ring. Both had success, neither gave any ground, and the underdog Akui was ahead on one official scorecard and trailing by just one point on the other two going into the 12th round. Then, suddenly, Teraji slammed into a higher gear, churning at Akui's head with both hands and whipsawing his foe's midsection with hooks until Akui, overwhelmed, fell into a clinch for the first time all night. The surge continued as Kenshiro summoned one heavy bomb after another from an apparently inexhaustible stockpile, still throwing and pursuing as Akui staggered backward and referee Katsuhiko Nakamura stepped in at 1:31.

With Akui's WBA belt now providing a counterbalance to the WBC strap already draped on Teraji's shoulder, the winner ascended to No. 1 on the list while the valiant

loser lost no ground at all, remaining at No. 3.

Anthony Olascaga (No. 7) retained his WBO title with a unanimous decision over Hiroto Kyoguchi (unrated) on the Teraji-Akui undercard, but many panelists felt that the Japanese fighter deserved the outright win or at the very least deserved a ranking for his effort. The former Ring junior flyweight champion entered at No. 10, replacing Yankiel Rivera.

Masamichi Yabuki traded in his IBF 108-pound belt for one at 112 after a grueling battle with defending titleholder Angel Ayala was stopped with a minute remaining in the 12th round. Both fighters were probably staggering as much from exhaustion as blood loss – the result of each sustaining a nasty cut in the third round – but Yabuki's relentless performance had already secured a points victory in every one of the previous 11 frames. He entered the ratings at No. 3, his arrival causing a downward push that ended Kyoguchi's brief stay, and Ayala slipped from No. 2 to No. 6.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT: Defending WBO titleholder Shokichi Iwata (No. 2 last month) seemed to be fortifying his pressure attack against unrated challenger Rene Santiago at the end of their fight's first half, but Santiago refused to be worn down and actually picked up steam as he boxed his way to a unanimous decision upset in Tokyo. The underestimated Puerto Rican claimed the No. 2 position for himself and knocked Iwata down to No. 4, which pushed No. 10-rated Elwin Soto off the list.

With the No. 1-rated Yabuki moving up in weight, everyone on the list gained a rank and a vacancy opened up at No. 10 for Thai veteran Panya Pradabsri.

STRAWWEIGHT: In Japan, WBC titleholder Melvin Jerusalem emphatically backed up his split decision win over Yudai Shigeoka in March 2024 – a victory made possible by two knockdowns – with a no-doubts, no-knockdowns-needed UD in the rematch. This time, he got it done by simply throwing and landing far more punches than his opponent. The loss dropped Shigeoka from No. 4 to No. 6 on the list while Jerusalem dug in at No. 1, just below Ring champion Oscar Collazo. On the same night in Mexico, Collazo, who took the WBO belt from Jerusalem with a seventh-round stoppage in May 2023, bypassed scorecards altogether in his win over Edwin Cano. He decided to take the "complete evisceration" route instead, stopping Cano with a body shot in the fifth round. RING

POUND FOR POUND LIST

1. **OLEKSANDR USYK** – Ukraine • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)
2. **NAOYA INOUE** – Japan • 29-0-0 (26 KOs)
3. **TERENCE CRAWFORD** – U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)
4. **DMITRY BIVOL** – Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
5. **ARTUR BETERBIEV** – Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)
6. **JESSE RODRIGUEZ** – U.S. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
7. **CANELO ALVAREZ** – Mexico • 62-2-2 (39 KOs)
8. **JUNTO NAKATANI** – Japan • 30-0-0 (23 KOs)
9. **DEVIN HANEY** – U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)
10. **KENSHIRO TERAJI** – Japan • 25-1-0 (16 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY** IBF, WBO – Kazakhstan • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 2 **CARLOS ADAMES** WBC – Dom. Rep. • 24-1-1 (18 KOs)
- 3 **HAMZAH SHEERAZ** – U.K. • 21-0-1 (17 KOs)
- 4 **ERISLANDY LARA** WBA – Cuba • 31-3-3 (19 KOs)
- 5 **CHRIS EUBANK JR.** – U.K. • 34-3-0 (25 KOs)
- 6 **ETINOSA OLIHA** – Italy • 21-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 7 **KYRONE DAVIS** – U.S. • 19-3-1 (6 KOs)
- 8 **TROY ISLEY** – U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)
- 9 **SHANE MOSLEY JR.** – U.S. • 22-4-0 (12 KOs)
- 10 **DENZEL BENTLEY** – U.K. • 21-3-1 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBA – U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)
- 2 **VERGIL ORTIZ** – U.S. • 23-0-0 (21 KOs)
- 3 **ISRAIL MADRIMOV** – Uzbekistan • 10-2-1 (7 KOs)
- 4 **BAKHRAM MURTAZALIEV** IBF – Russia • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 5 **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA** WBC, WBO – U.S. • 22-1-1 (14 KOs)
- 6 **SERHII BOHACHUK** – Ukraine • 25-2-0 (24 KOs)
- 7 **TIM TSZYU** – Australia • 25-2-0 (18 KOs)
- 8 **JESUS RAMOS** – U.S. • 23-1-0 (19 KOs)
- 9 **CHARLES CONWELL** – U.S. • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)
- 10 **XANDER ZAYAS** – Puerto Rico • 21-0-0 (13 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **JARON ENNIS** IBF – U.S. • 33-0-0 (29 KOs)
- 2 **EIMANTAS STANIONIS** WBA – Lithuania • 15-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 3 **BRIAN NORMAN JR.** WBO – U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- 4 **MARIO BARRIOS** WBC – U.S. • 29-2-1 (18 KOs)
- 5 **GIOVANI SANTILLAN** – U.S. • 33-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 6 **SHAKHRAM GIYASOV** – Uzbekistan • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 7 **JIN SASAKI** – Japan • 19-1-1 (17 KOs)
- 8 **ALEXIS ROCHA** – U.S. • 25-2-1 (16 KOs)
- 9 **RAUL CURIEL** – Mexico • 15-0-1 (13 KOs)
- 10 **ROHAN POLANCO** – Dom. Rep. • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- C **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** RING, WBO – U.S. • 21-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 1 **DEVIN HANEY** – U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)
- 2 **RICHARDSON HITCHINS** IBF – U.S. • 19-0-0 (7 KOs)
- 3 **ARNOLD BARBOZA** – U.S. • 32-0-0 (11 KOs)
- 4 **ALBERTO PUELLO** WBC – Dom. Rep. • 24-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 5 **JACK CATTERALL** – U.K. • 30-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 6 **LIAM PARO** – Australia • 25-1-0 (15 KOs)
- 7 **SUBRIEL MATIAS** – Puerto Rico • 22-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 8 **GARY ANTUANNE RUSSELL** WBA – U.S. • 18-1-0 (17 KOs)
- 9 **SANDOR MARTIN** – Spain • 42-4-0 (15 KOs)
- 10 **JOSH TAYLOR** – U.K. • 19-2-0 (13 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

- C **OLEKSANDR USYK** RING, WBA, WBC, WBO – Ukraine • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)
- 1 **TYSON FURY** – U.K. • 34-2-1 (24 KOs)
- 2 **DANIEL DUBOIS** IBF – U.K. • 22-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 3 **JOSEPH PARKER** – New Zealand • 36-3-0 (24 KOs)
- 4 **AGIT KABAYEL** – Germany • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 5 **ANTHONY JOSHUA** – U.K. • 28-4-0 (25 KOs)
- 6 **FILIP HRGOVIC** – Croatia • 18-1-0 (14 KOs)
- 7 **ZHILEI ZHANG** – China • 27-3-1 (22 KOs)
- 8 **MARTIN BAKOLE** – Congo • 21-2-0 (16 KOs)
- 9 **FABIO WARDLEY** – U.K. • 18-0-1 (17 KOs)
- 10 **EFE AJAGBA** – Nigeria • 20-1-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

- C **JAI OPETAIA** RING, IBF – Australia • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- 1 **GILBERTO RAMIREZ** WBA, WBO – Mexico • 47-1-0 (30 KOs)
- 2 **CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH** – U.K. • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 3 **ALEKSEI PAPIN** – Russia • 18-1-0 (17 KOs)
- 4 **RICHARD RIAKPORHE** – U.K. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 5 **MICHAL CIESLAK** – Poland • 27-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 6 **RYAN ROZICKI** – Canada • 20-1-1 (19 KOs)
- 7 **YAMIL PERALTA** – Argentina • 17-1-1 (9 KOs)
- 8 **BRANDON GLANTON** – U.S. • 20-2-0 (17 KOs)
- 9 **LEONARDO MOSQUEA** – France • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 10 **ROBIN SIRWAN SAFAR** – Sweden • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

- C **DMITRY BIVOL** RING, IBF, WBA, WBO – Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 1 **ARTUR BETERBIEV** – Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)
- 2 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ** WBC – U.S. • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)
- 3 **CALLUM SMITH** – U.K. • 31-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 4 **ANTHONY YARDE** – U.K. • 26-3-0 (24 KOs)
- 5 **JOSHUA BUATSI** – U.K. • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 6 **ALBERT RAMIREZ** – Venezuela • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 7 **OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK** – Ukraine • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)
- 8 **DAVID MORRELL** – Cuba • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)
- 9 **WILLY HUTCHINSON** – U.K. • 18-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 10 **IMAM KHATAEV** – Russia • 10-0-0 (9 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- C **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, WBA, WBC, WBO – Mexico • 62-2-2 (39 KOs)
- 1 **CHRISTIAN MBILLI** – France • 28-0-0 (23 KOs)
- 2 **DIEGO PACHECO** – U.S. • 23-0-0 (18 KOs)
- 3 **OSLEYS IGLESIAS** – Cuba • 13-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 4 **CALEB PLANT** – U.S. • 23-2-0 (14 KOs)
- 5 **WILLIAM SCULL** IBF – Cuba • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 6 **VLADIMIR SHISHKIN** – Russia • 16-1-0 (10 KOs)
- 7 **BRUNO SURACE** – France • 26-0-2 (5 KOs)
- 8 **JAIME MUNGUIA** – Mexico • 44-2-0 (35 KOs)
- 9 **EDGAR BERLANGA** – U.S. • 23-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 10 **LESTER MARTINEZ** – Guatemala • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)

HRGOVIC : Alex Livesey

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **GERVONTA DAVIS** WBA – U.S. • 30-0-1 (28 KOs)
- 2 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** IBF – Ukraine • 18-3-0 (12 KOs)
- 3 **KEYSHAWN DAVIS** WBO – U.S. • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 4 **SHAKUR STEVENSON** WBC – U.S. • 23-0-0 (11 KOs)
- 5 **WILLIAM ZEPEDA** – Mexico • 33-0-0 (27 KOs)
- 6 **RAYMOND MURATALLA** – U.S. • 22-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 7 **ANDY CRUZ** – Cuba • 5-0-0 (2 KOs)
- 8 **FRANK MARTIN** – U.S. • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 9 **DENYS BERINCHYK** – Ukraine • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)
- 10 **TEVIN FARMER** – U.S. • 33-8-1 (8 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO – Mexico • 39-2-1 (32 KOs)
- 2 **O'SHAQUIE FOSTER** WBC – U.S. • 23-3-0 (12 KOs)
- 3 **ANTHONY CACACE** IBF – Ireland • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)
- 4 **LAMONT ROACH** WBA – U.S. • 25-1-2 (10 KOs)
- 5 **JOE CORDINA** – U.K. • 17-1-0 (9 KOs)
- 6 **ROBSON CONCEICAO** – Brazil • 19-3-1 (9 KOs)
- 7 **EDUARDO NUNEZ** – Mexico • 27-1-0 (27 KOs)
- 8 **EDUARDO HERNANDEZ** – Mexico • 37-2-0 (32 KOs)
- 9 **ALBERT BATYRGAZIEV** – Russia • 12-0-0 (8 KOs)
- 10 **ALBERT BELL** – U.S. • 26-0-0 (9 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **ANGELO LEO** IBF – U.S. • 25-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 2 **RAFAEL ESPINOZA** WBO – Mexico • 26-0-0 (22 KOs)
- 3 **NICK BALL** WBA – U.K. • 22-0-1 (12 KOs)
- 4 **STEPHEN FULTON** WBC – U.S. • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)
- 5 **LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ** – Mexico • 31-3-0 (18 KOs)
- 6 **BRANDON FIGUEROA** – U.S. • 25-2-1 (19 KOs)
- 7 **BRUCE CARRINGTON** – U.S. • 15-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 8 **MIRCO CUELLO** – Argentina • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 9 **ROBEISY RAMIREZ** – Cuba • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)
- 10 **OMAR TRINIDAD** – U.S. • 18-0-1 (13 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- C **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO – Japan • 29-0-0 (26 KOs)
- 1 **MARLON TAPALES** – Philippines • 39-4-0 (20 KOs)
- 2 **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** – Uzbekistan • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- 3 **LUIS NERY** – Mexico • 36-2-0 (28 KOs)
- 4 **SAM GOODMAN** – Australia • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)
- 5 **ALAN PICASSO** – Mexico • 31-0-1 (17 KOs)
- 6 **SHABAZ MASOUD** – U.K. • 14-0-0 (4 KOs)
- 7 **TJ DOHENY** – Ireland • 26-6-0 (20 KOs)
- 8 **ELIJAH PIERCE** – U.S. • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)
- 9 **RAMON CARDENAS** – U.S. • 26-1-0 (14 KOs)
- 10 **SEBASTIAN HERNANDEZ** – Mexico • 19-0-0 (18 KOs)

RING RATINGS ANALYSIS Through fights of April 5, 2025

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 JUNTO NAKATANI WBC
Japan • 30-0-0 (23 KOs)
2 RYOSUKE NISHIDA IBF
Japan • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)
3 SEIYA TSUTSUMI WBA
Japan • 12-0-3 (8 KOs)
4 YOSHIKI TAKEI WBO
Japan • 10-0-0 (8 KOs)
5 TAKUMA INOUE
Japan • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)
6 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ
Puerto Rico • 22-3-0 (13 KOs)
7 DAIGO HIGA
Japan • 21-3-2 (19 KOs)
8 TENSHIN NASUKAWA
Japan • 6-0-0 (2 KOs)
9 JASON MOLONEY
Australia • 27-4-0 (19 KOs)
10 JEYVIER CINTRON
Puerto Rico • 13-1-0 (6 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C JESSE RODRIGUEZ RING, WBC
U.S. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
1 FERNANDO MARTINEZ WBA
Argentina • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 44-4-0 (28 KOs)
3 KAZUTO IOKA
Japan • 31-3-1 (16 KOs)
4 PHUMELELE CAFU WBO
South Africa • 11-0-3 (8 KOs)
5 KOSEI TANAKA
Japan • 20-2-0 (11 KOs)
6 CARLOS CUADRAS
Mexico • 43-5-1 (28 KOs)
7 ANDREW MOLONEY
Australia • 27-4-0 (17 KOs)
8 DAVID JIMENEZ
Costa Rica • 17-1-0 (11 KOs)
9 SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI
Thailand • 58-6-1 (47 KOs)
10 PEDRO GUEVARA
Mexico • 42-5-1 (22 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 KENSHIRO TERAJI WBA, WBC
Japan • 25-1-0 (16 KOs)
2 SEIGO YURI AKUI
Japan • 21-3-1 (11 KOs)
3 MASAMICHI YABUKI IBF
Japan • 18-4-0 (17 KOs)
4 GALAL YAFAI
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
5 RICARDO SANDOVAL
U.S. • 26-2-0 (18 KOs)
6 ANGEL AYALA
Mexico • 18-1-0 (8 KOs)
7 FELIX ALVARADO
Nicaragua • 42-4-0 (35 KOs)
8 ANTHONY OLASCUAGA WBO
U.S. • 9-1-0 (6 KOs)
9 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.
Mexico • 39-6-1 (27 KOs)
10 TOBIAS REYES
Argentina • 16-1-1 (15 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 RENE SANTIAGO WBO
Puerto Rico • 14-4-0 (9 KOs)
2 SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA
S. Africa • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
3 SHOKICHI IWATA
Japan • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)
4 CARLOS CANIZALES
Venezuela • 27-3-1 (19 KOs)
5 ADRIAN CURIEL
Mexico • 25-6-1 (5 KOs)
6 THANONGSAK SIMSRI
Thailand • 38-1-0 (34 KOs)
7 CRISTIAN ARANETA
Philippines • 25-2-0 (20 KOs)
8 REGIE SUGANOB
Philippines • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)
9 ERICK ROSA WBA
Dom. Rep. • 8-0-0 (2 KOs)
10 PANYA PRADABSRI
Thailand • 44-2-0 (27 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C OSCAR COLLAZO RING, WBA, WBO
U.S. • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)
1 MELVIN JERUSALEM WBC
Philippines • 24-3-0 (12 KOs)
2 PEDRO TADURAN IBF
Philippines • 17-4-1 (13 KOs)
3 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
Thailand • 25-1-0 (9 KOs)
4 GINJIRO SHIGEOKA
Japan • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)
5 HASANBOY DUSMATOV
Uzbekistan • 6-0-0 (5 KOs)
6 YUDAI SHIGEOKA
Japan • 9-2-0 (5 KOs)
7 DIANXING ZHU
China • 14-1-0 (12 KOs)
8 SIYAKHOLWA KUSE
S. Africa • 8-2-1 (4 KOs)
9 YUNI TAKADA
Japan • 16-8-3 (6 KOs)
10 JOEY CANOY
Philippines • 23-5-2 (14 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose their belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which they are champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at their championship weight for 18 months (even if they fight at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

Fundora: Steve Marcus; Tszyu: Darrian Traynor

Women's Ring Ratings Analysis

Through fights of April 8, 2025 • By Diego Morilla

Nic Antaya

POUND-FOR-POUND: In a few short weeks, several changes took place in the mythical ranking of the best fighters in the world regardless of weight.

Costa Rica's Yokasta Valle (No. 8 last month) was the first fighter to receive consideration for an upgrade after a non-title flyweight bout against former Ring champion Marlen Esparza in Mexico. Valle looked her usual aggressive and awesome self in dissecting Esparza to win a split decision, but was not deemed impressive enough to one-up Ring welterweight queen Lauren Price, who entered the list last month after defeating Natasha Jonas.

A different situation sprang from Mikaela Mayer's win over Sandy Ryan, in which Mayer erased all doubts in the rematch of what is shaping up as a historic rivalry. The U.S. Olympian (No. 10 last month) got shortchanged when Price broke into the ratings and pushed everyone below down

Yokasta Valle (left) catches Marlen Esparza during an exchange.

one spot. With Caroline Dubois also breaking in at No. 10, someone had to go – and it was Mayer. True, a number of panelists indicated that Mayer had enough merits to remain rated, but since she had lost to Baumgardner, it felt odd to keep Mayer on at the expense of her conqueror.

Mayer's absence, however, was short-lived. Her unanimous decision win over **Ryan** brought her back to the ratings at No. 9, ousting Dubois in the process. Dubois, who had made her first foray into the ratings after beating South Korea's Bo Mi Re Shin in a title bout, will surely be back.

Germany's "Tiny" Tina Rupprecht then took the No. 10 position after defending her inaugural Ring atomweight belt and becoming the undisputed 102-pound champion with a majority decision over Japan's Sumire Yamanaka.

WELTERWEIGHT: It was not as controversial as the first fight, but the Mayer-Ryan rematch had all the markings of a classic that clamors to become a trilogy. There was a wide disparity in scorecards across press row, with some people giving Mayer almost every round and others seeing a narrower path of victory for her, but it was widely seen as a win in any case. She can't go any higher than No. 1, and Ryan is still head and shoulders above the rest of the pack, so right now all that remains to be seen is whether Price will meet Mayer for a U.K. vs. U.S. mega-clash with all the marbles at stake.

FEATHERWEIGHT: A grudge match that delivered, for once: Despite her glossy record, Tiara Brown had been largely ignored by the panel due to her inconsistency in activity, poor choice of opponents and weight changes. But she punched all the way to the top of the division with a majority decision win over No. 1-rated Skye Nicolson, who dropped to No. 2. The mild upset was a beautiful scrap and a tough break for Karriss Artingstall, who lasted only one week in the No. 5 position that she earned after beating Raven Chapman.

BANTAMWEIGHT: The rematch of the hotly contested May 2024 fight between Cherneka Johnson and Nina Hughes – a majority decision loss for Hughes – was not even close. Johnson was already dominating the action when she stopped Hughes in the seventh round, which earned the Australian a promotion from No. 2 to the No. 1 position on our list. At 42, the end of the line should be close for Hughes (No. 3 last month), but the panel decided that dropping her to No. 5 was punishment enough for her loss, and thus she stays rated to fight another day.

FLYWEIGHT: Valle took a brave step in going up two divisions, from 105 pounds, to face Esparza. Too bad Esparza had the same idea. The notoriously undisciplined U.S. Olympian missed weight (by 1.5 pounds) for the third straight time in flyweight bouts, which meant that No. 2-rated Esparza, who lost in a spirited effort to Valle in this non-title bout, was finally dropped from our ratings. With Mexican legend Ibeth Zamora (No. 5) dismissed for inactivity at the weight, two new spots opened up. Mexico's Marilyn Badillo Amaya took No. 4, and Polish/British contender Jasmina Zapotoczna broke in at No. 5.

STRAWWEIGHT: Terrific fight, disappointing result: The Sol Cudos-Sol Baumstarh fight for neighborhood bragging rights was the all-Argentine grudge match that everyone expected, but the feeling was that Baumstarh had outshone Cudos with a superbly aggressive performance that included a clean knockdown – and yet Cudos took home the vacant IBF strap via split decision. One judge scored it in line with most observers (96-93 for Baumstarh), another went narrowly with Cudos (95-94) and the third appeared to be watching an entirely different fight (96-93 for Cudos). Still, kudos to Cudos, of course, but neither of these fine athletes were moved from their respective positions (No. 4 for Cudos, No. 5 for Baumstarh). A rematch – hopefully with better judges at ringside – could affect things differently.

ATOMWEIGHT: Germany's Rupprecht, our inaugural Ring atomweight champion, has at this point almost swept the entire division and appears to have found her absolute prime as a fighter. Her close win over Yamanaka proved it and catapulted Rupprecht into the pound-for-pound Top 10. Yamanaka remained rated at No. 1 after a fight that made the case for a fan-friendly rematch. RING

Steve Marcus

POUND FOR POUND LIST

1	**CLARESSA SHIELDS**	U.S. • 16-0-0 (3 KOs)
2	**KATIE TAYLOR**	Ireland • 24-1-0 (6 KOs)
3	**CHANTELLE CAMERON**	U.K. • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
4	**AMANDA SERRANO**	Puerto Rico • 47-3-1 (31 KOs)
5	**DINA THORSLUND**	Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
6	**GABRIELA FUNDORA**	U.S. • 15-0-0 (7 KOs)
7	**LAUREN PRICE**	U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KO)
8	**YOKASTA VALLE**	Costa Rica • 32-3-0 (10 KOs)
9	**MIKAELA MAYER**	U.S. • 21-2-0 (5 KOs)
10	**TINA RUPPRECHT**	Germany 15-1-1 (3 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- C **SAVANNAH MARSHALL** RING,IBF — U.K. • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- 1 **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** WBA,WBC — U.S. • 9-2-0 (2 KOs)
- 2 **SHADASIA GREEN** WBO — U.S. • 15-1-0 (11 KOs)
- 3 **LANI DANIELS** — New Zealand • 11-2-2 (1 KO)
- 4 **MARY CASAMASSA** — U.S. • 6-0-0 (1 KO)
- 5 **CITLALLI ORTIZ** — Mexico • 4-1-0 (1 KO)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING,WBA — U.S. • 16-0-0 (3 KOs)
- 1 **DESLEY ROBINSON** IBF — Australia • 9-3-0 (3 KOs)
- 2 **MELINDA WATPOOL** — Canada • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
- 3 **MAPULE NGUBANE** — S. Africa • 14-9-3 (3 KOs)
- 4 **ADRIANA DOS SANTOS ARAUJO** — Brazil • 6-3-0 (1 KO)
- 5 **CHLOE CHAOS** — Australia • 6-1-1 (3 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- C. **(VACANT)**
- 1 **OSHAE JONES** IBF — U.S. • 8-0-0 (3 KOs)
- 2 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS** — Norway • 38-2-1 (9 KOs)
- 3 **FEMKE HERMANS** — Belgium • 18-5-0 (7 KOs)
- 4 **MARY SPENCER** WBA — Canada • 9-2-0 (6 KOs)
- 5 **PRISCILLA PETERLE** — France • 11-0-0 (3 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- C **LAUREN PRICE** RING,IBF,WBA,WBC — U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KO)
- 1 **MIKAELA MAYER** WBO — U.S. • 21-2-0 (5 KOs)
- 2 **NATASHA JONAS** — U.K. • 16-3-1 (9 KOs)
- 3 **SANDY RYAN** — U.K. • 7-3-1 (3 KOs)
- 4 **MICHAELA KOTASKOVA** — Czech Rep. • 10-0-2 (4 KOs)
- 5 **STEPHANIE AQUINO** — Puerto Rico • 8-0-0 (2 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- C **KATIE TAYLOR** RING,IBF,WBA,WBC,WBO — Ireland • 24-1-0 (6 KOs)
- 1 **CHANTELLE CAMERON** — U.K. • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
- 2 **SAMANTHA WORTHINGTON** — U.S. • 11-0-0 (7 KOs)
- 3 **FLORA PILI** — France • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
- 4 **ELIZABETH OSHOBA** — Nigeria • 9-0-0 (5 KOs)
- 5 **ELHEM MEKHALED** — France • 17-3-0 (3 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- C. **(VACANT)**
- 1 **CAROLINE DUBOIS** WBC — U.K. • 11-0-1 (5 KOs)
- 2 **BEATRIZ FERREIRA** IBF — Brazil • 6-0-0 (2 KOs)
- 3 **TERRI HARPER** WBO — U.K. • 15-2-2 (6 KOs)
- 4 **RHIANNON DIXON** — U.K. • 10-1-0 (1 KO)
- 5 **BO MI RE SHIN** — South Korea • 18-3-3 (10 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- C **ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** RING,IBF,WBA,WBC,WBO — U.S. • 15-1-0 (7 KOs)
- 1 **DELFINE PERSOON** — Belgium • 49-3-0 (19 KOs)
- 2 **LEILA BEAUDOIN** — Canada • 12-1-0 (1 KO)
- 3 **JENNIFER MIRANDA** — Spain • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
- 4 **MEA MOTU** — New Zealand • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
- 5 **RIMA AYADI** — France • 11-0-0 (1 KO)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- C **AMANDA SERRANO** RING,WBA,WBO — Puerto Rico • 47-3-1 (31 KOs)
- 1 **TIARA BROWN** WBC — U.S. • 19-0-0 (11 KOS)
- 2 **SKYE NICOLSON** — Australia • 12-1-0 (1 KO)
- 3 **NINA MEINKE** IBF — German • 19-3-0 (4 KOs)
- 4 **SARAH MAHFOUD** — Denmark • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
- 5 **DANIELA BERMUDEZ** — Argentina • 32-5-3 (12 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- C **ELLIE SCOTNEY** RING,IBF,WBO — U.K. • 10-0-0 (0 KOs)
- 1 **YAMILETH MERCADO** WBC — Mexico • 24-3-0 (5 KOs)
- 2 **SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE** — France • 19-1-0 (1 KO)
- 3 **NAZARENA ROMERO** WBA — Argentina • 14-0-2 (8 KOs)
- 4 **ERIKA CRUZ-HERNANDEZ** — Mexico • 17-2-1 (3 KOs)
- 5 **MIKIAH KREPS** — U.S. • 9-0-0 (3 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- C **DINA THORSLUND** RING,WBC,WBO — Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 1 **CHERNEKA JOHNSON** WBA — Australia • 17-2-0 (7 KOs)
- 2 **YULIAHN LUNA AVILA** — Mexico • 28-4-1 (4 KOs)
- 3 **SHURRETTA METCALF** IBF — U.S. • 14-4-1 (2 KOs)
- 4 **DIANA LAURA FERNANDEZ** — Mexico • 34-4-1 (5 KOs)
- 5 **NINA HUGHES** — U.K. • 6-2-0 (2 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **MIZUKI HIRUTA** WBO — Japan • 7-0-0 (2 KOs)
- 2 **CARLA MERINO** — Argentina • 16-2-0 (4 KOs)
- 3 **GINNY FUCHS** — U.S. • 4-0-0 (1 KO)
- 4 **ADELAIDA RUIZ** — U.S. • 16-1-1 (8 KOs)
- 5 **ASLEY GONZALEZ** WBC — Mexico • 17-2-0 (7 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- C **GABRIELA FUNDORA** RING,IBF,WBA,WBC,WBO — U.S. • 15-0-0 (7 KOs)
- 1 **GABRIELA ALANIZ** — Argentina • 16-2-0 (6 KOs)
- 2 **KENIA ENRIQUEZ** — Mexico • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)
- 3 **ARELY MUCINO** — Mexico • 32-5-2 (11 KOs)
- 4 **MARILYN BADILLO AMAYA** — Mexico • 19-0-1 (3 KOs)
- 5 **JAZMINA ZAPOTOCZNA** — U.K. • 9-1-0 (0 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **EVELIN BERMUDEZ** IBF,WBO — Argentina • 21-1-1 (7 KOs)
- 2 **KIM CLAVEL** — Canada • 21-2-0 (3 KOs)
- 3 **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC — Mexico • 38-4-0 (5 KOs)
- 4 **SARA BAILEY** WBA — Canada • 6-0 (0 KOs)
- 5 **GABRIELA ALANIZ** — Argentina • 16-2-0 (6 KOS)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **YOKASTA VALLE** WBC — Costa Rica • 33-3-0 (10 KOs)
- 2 **SARAH BORMANN** WBO — Germany • 19-1-0 (7 KOs)
- 3 **YUKO KUROKI** WBA — Japan • 24-8-2 (10 KOs)
- 4 **SOL CUDOS** — Argentina • 10-0-2 (3 KOs)
- 5 **SOL BAUMSTARH** — Argentina • 12-7-1 (8 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

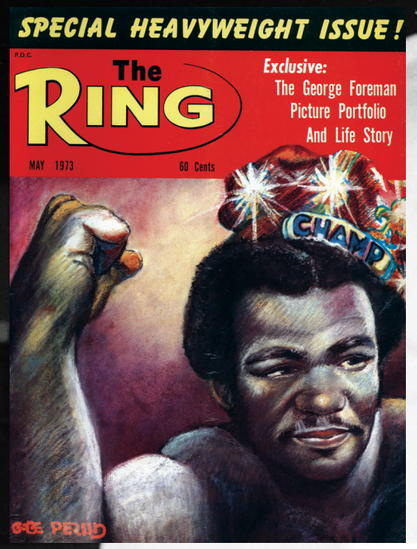
- C **TINA RUPPRECHT** RING,WBA,WBC,WBO — Germany • 15-1-1 (3 KOs)
- 1 **SUMIRE YAMANAKA** IBF — Japan • 8-1-0 (3 KOs)
- 2 **ERI MATSUDA** — Japan • 7-2-1 (1 KO)
- 3 **ESNEIDY RODRIGUEZ OLMOS** — Mexico • 9-0-1 (0 KOs)
- 4 **FABIANA BYTYQI** — Czech Republic • 21-1-2 (5 KOs)
- 5 **NAO UGAWA** — Japan • 6-0-0 (0 KOs)

A Gentle GIANT

AS A TRIBUTE TO **GEORGE FOREMAN**, WE PRESENT A VINTAGE ARTICLE CHRONICLING THE ROAD TO HIS FIRST HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP

By George Girsch

This feature originally appeared in the May 1973 issue of The Ring. It is being presented verbatim and includes language and phrasing considered acceptable at that time.



Foreman works out alongside coach Dick Sadler in New York circa 1972.

The shockwaves of George Foreman's stunning two-round knockout of Joe Frazier are still being felt around the boxing world. There are many who feel that big George's victory over the heretofore invincible Frazier was simply a fluke, that Frazier was (a) not in top condition and (b) failed to take Foreman seriously enough. And, if you listen to Cassius Clay, he'll have you believe he's the one who really beat Frazier, and that Foreman, despite the fact he is the heavyweight champion of the world, is the rankest of amateurs.

But George Foreman is as big as life and hits twice as hard. He is a gentle giant, goes about his business quietly and efficiently, believes in God and the United States of America, not to mention Mom's apple pie.

A fellow who waves a little American flag after winning the Olympic heavyweight Gold Medal can't be all bad.

The 25th boxer to hold the heavyweight title was born in Marshall, Texas, on January 22, 1948 (editor's note: This should be 1949), when Joe Louis was a year away from retiring as heavyweight boss.

George was the fifth of seven children born to a railroad construction worker and his wife, Nancy.

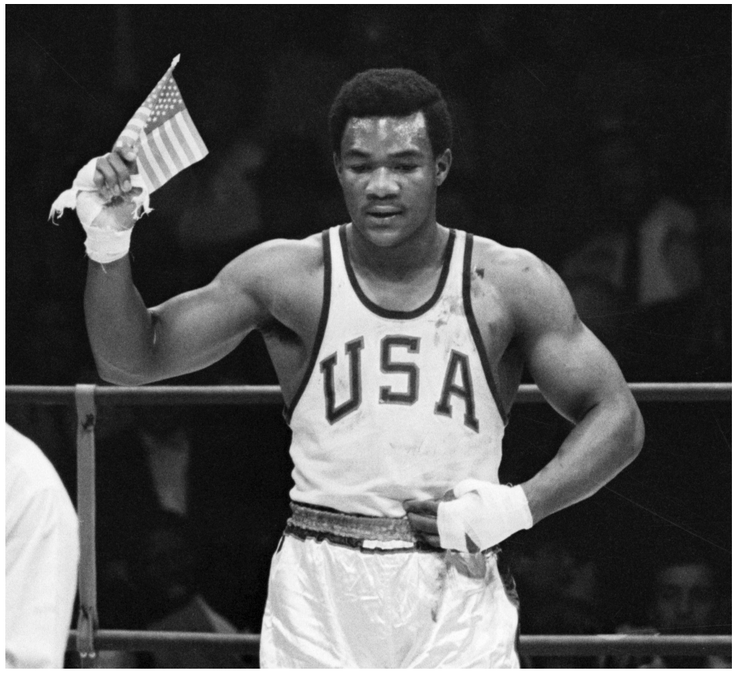
"I was always in trouble as a kid," George candidly admits. "The juvenile authorities were always after me. I grew up in the Fifth Ward in Houston, which is mostly black. The cops knew me. You name it, I had done it. There was one week when I broke 200 windows and didn't even get caught. But the next week I'm walking down the street with a rock in my hand and the cops picked me up.

"In the Bloody Fifth I mingled with dope addicts, ex-cons, the worst of thieves and criminals. At the time it seemed as if I would end up just like them. And I was always in some kind of street fight.

"I also was a high school dropout, quitting E. O. Smith Junior High in 1963, then took to hanging around on street corners because there didn't seem to be much of anything else to do."

Of course, that spelled more trouble. Then came the dawning and a complete turnabout in the life of George Foreman, future champion of the world.

When he was 16, he saw pro football star Jim Brown on television talking about the Job Corps. Deciding that he had nothing to lose, Foreman joined up in 1965 and was sent to the Fort Vannoy Conversation Center, near Grants Pass, Oregon, where he learned bricklaying and carpentry.



As a 19-year-old, Foreman captured Olympic heavyweight gold in Mexico.

In February 1966, George was assigned to the Parks Job Corps Center, operated for the Job Corps by Litton Industries, in Pleasanton, California, about 40 miles east of Oakland. It was there where he qualified as an electronics assembler and earned his high school equivalency certificate.

Always a good athlete, Foreman spent many of his off-duty hours playing tackle on the Pleasanton football team, where his size and speed attracted the attention of Nick (Doc) Broadus, the camp's vocational guidance director.

Broadus talked Foreman into trying some boxing. The youngster put on a pair of gloves for the first time in December 1966 and, as Broadus recalls, was given a rather rough time of it by veteran Max Briggs. For several days thereafter, George stayed away from the gym.

"I went looking for him," remembers Broadus. "He told me he didn't have any tennis shoes, so I got a pair for him and invited him to work out with the team. He trained for a few weeks, then disappeared again when he was scheduled to appear with the Parks team in a local meet. But later, he showed up and began working out again with the squad."

Foreman's debut as an amateur boxer occurred on January 26, 1967, when he scored a one-round knockout in the Parks Department Diamond Belt Tournament.

Bettmann

In February 1967, Foreman won the San Francisco Examiner's Golden Gloves Junior Division heavyweight title. Later that month, George went to Las Vegas, Nev., to capture the Golden Gloves Senior Division crown with a knockout of Thomas Cook.

In early March, Foreman lost a split decision in the Senior Division finals of the National Golden Gloves.

Doc Broadus was extremely pleased with the progress of his young charge. He felt that in George he had a future ring great, predicting, "He'll stop everybody in sight because he's a natural. God bless the puncher."

But it wasn't until much later that George began to appreciate the faith Broadus had in him. "Doc kept talking about the 1968 Olympics and how I could win a Gold Medal in Mexico City. But it didn't make too much of an impression on me. What did I know about the Olympics? But Broadus kept telling me about Floyd Patterson, Cassius Clay and Joe Frazier and what the Olympics had done for them. Suddenly, I developed a lot of interest in what Doc had been telling me."

In July 1967, Foreman completed his training with the Job Corps and went back to Houston. He couldn't find a job, however.

George then decided to return to the Job Corps as an avocation instructor, being paid $465 a month in the Parks' physical education department.

In recalling his failure to find work in Houston, George says, "I think it's discrimination, but I can't prove it."

He went back to boxing with an eye set on the Olympics. George won his first fight in 58 seconds, and the next in 54 seconds. In January, 1968, Foreman took on Clay Hodges, the National Golden Gloves champion, but lost a split decision.

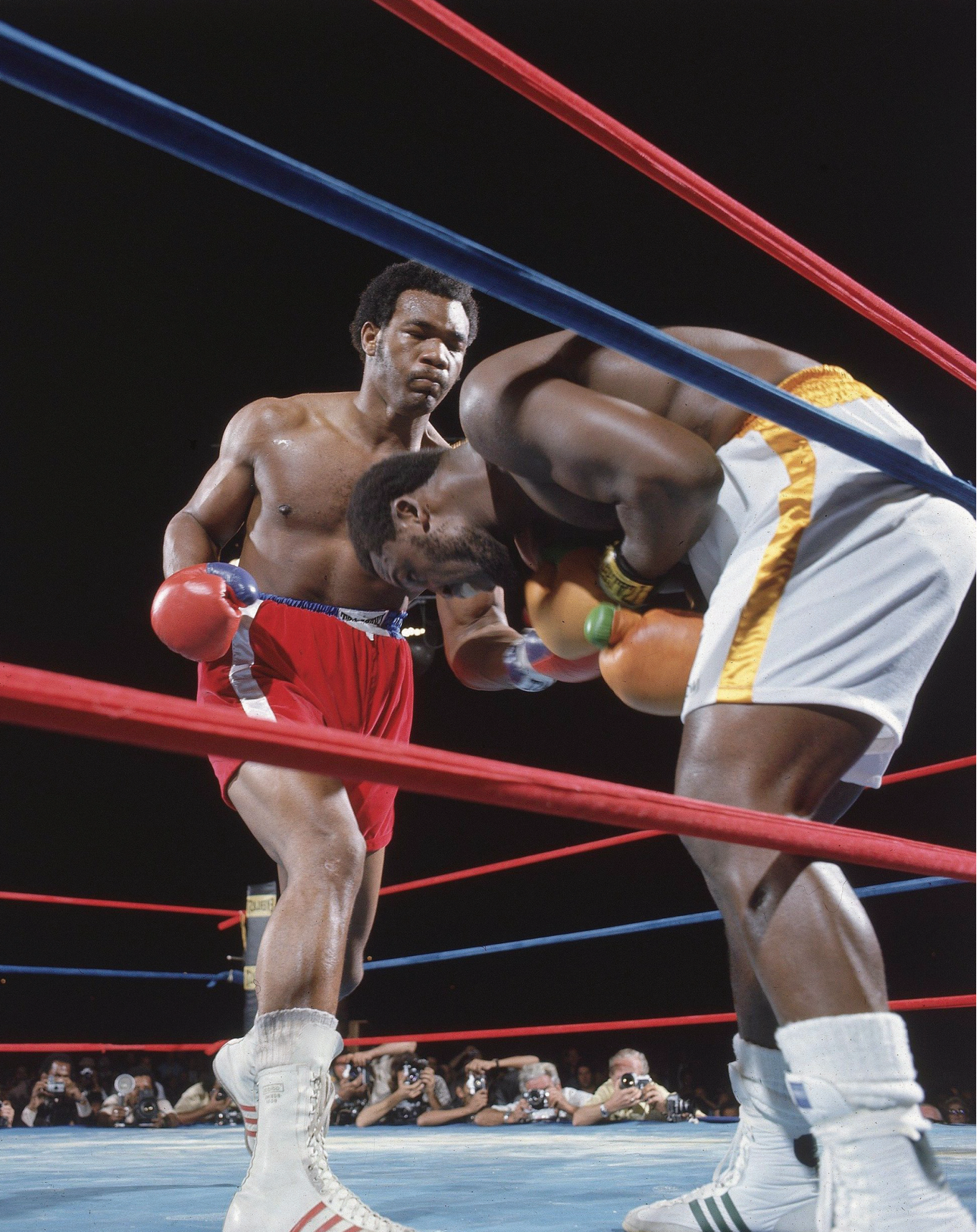
In February, George won the Examiner Senior title in San Francisco with a KO over L. C. Brown. A bit later that month, in Las Vegas, Foreman dropped another decision to Hodges.

Then in March, Foreman captured the National AAU heavyweight championship in Toledo, O., by winning four bouts, three by knockouts. That accomplishment virtually assured George of a place on the U.S. Olympic team.

In August 1968, the AAU sent a 10-man team to West Germany, where Foreman won two of three bouts, the loss coming on a disqualification for an accidental punch to the back of his opponent's head.

Foreman attacks Brazil's Luis Perez at Madison Square Garden in 1971.

Upon returning to the U.S., Foreman faced a final match for a berth on the Olympic squad against Otis Evans, whom Foreman had decisioned in Toledo for the AAU crown. It was on September 21 at the Olympic training site in Santa Fe, N.M., that George defeated Evans via a unanimous decision, thus becoming the heavyweight representative of the U.S.A. at Mexico City.



Herb Scharfman

The previously unbeaten Joe Frazier couldn't withstand Foreman's bombs.

In his first contest, Foreman defeated Polish southpaw Lucjan Trela, then took care of Romania's Ion Alexe. In the semi-final, George was matched with the favorite, Giorgio Bambini of Italy. It was in round two that Foreman stopped the Italian with a tremendous right to the head. Then it was into the final against Russia's Ionas Chepulis, who was defeated in two rounds when the referee halted matters due to the battering being taken by the Russian. [Editor's note: Chepulis was from Lithuania, part of the Soviet Union at the time.]

Then it was that George Foreman won his way into the hearts of his countrymen. At the medal presentation, Foreman began waving a miniature American flag, a patriotic gesture which thrilled millions back home who were watching on television. George's display was the direct opposite of that put on by a few black militants at the Mexico City Games.

"I did it, first because I'm an American," explained George. "Second, because I'm George Foreman, and third because I was proud to be representing my country. I had on this old robe that I still wear that says on the back 'George Foreman, The Fighting Corpsman.' It was given to me by Doc Broadus. In the pockets I had my lucky beads and a little American flag. After the finals I just pulled out the little American flag. People saw it and applauded, so I waved it around. I didn't look at it as a protest or anti-protest. It was just the way I felt at that moment."

Just as the Job Corps changed his life, so did the Olympic victory. Foreman decided to turn to professional boxing and signed with Dick Sadler, an old vaudeville song-and-dance man, who was very knowledgeable and had worked with such boxers as Archie Moore, Sonny Liston, Freddie Little and Charley Shipes.

It was on June 23, 1969, that Foreman made his pro debut.

It was a preliminary bout at New York's Madison Square Garden on the Joe Frazier-Jerry Quarry card. Foreman disposed of Don Waldhelm in three rounds. Six more quick kayos followed, among them a three-round stoppage of Chuck Wepner.

> "The title belongs to the people, not the individual."

It was on October 31 that George was taken the full distance for the first time, winning a decision from Roberto Davila in eight rounds in New York. Three more knockouts followed before George decisioned Levi Forte in 10 sessions at Miami Beach. Foreman closed out 1969 with a one-round stoppage of Gary Wilder, giving him 13 victories in his first pro year.

George began 1970 with knockouts of Charley Polite and Jack O'Halloran before going the 10-round distance with Gregorio Peralta, a tough hombre from Argentina. Since then, Foreman has scored 22 straight knockouts including the Frazier bout – thus the Peralta bout was the last time George has gone the scheduled distance. All three contests, oddly enough, took place in New York. [Editor's note: As mentioned earlier, one of those three decision wins took place in Florida.]

George scored 12 times in '70, among his other victims being James J. Woody in three; George Johnson in seven; George Chuvalo in three; and Boone Kirkman in two.

Slowing down a bit in 1971, George was sent to the well by Sadler on seven occasions. His KO victims were Charlie Boston, Stamford Harris, Gregorio Peralta, Vic Scott, Leroy Caldwell, Ollie Wilson and Luis Pires. Peralta, who was halted in the tenth, was the only one to last beyond four rounds.

In 1972, Foreman racked up five two-round kayos, victimizing Joe Murphy Gordwin, Clarence Boone, Ted Gullick, Miguel Paez and Terry Sorrell. Thus, Frazier, in January of this year became Foreman's sixth straight two-round kayo victim.

George's father, J.D., and his mother, Nancy, both live in Houston. George, who loves animals and likes to train dogs, recently became the proud father of a little girl named Michi, born to his wife, Adrienne, in Minneapolis. George and Adrienne met on a blind date two years ago.

Foreman makes his home in Hayward, Calif., where Sadler also resides. George also has a home in Minneapolis, his wife's hometown.

Archie Moore, one of Foreman's advisors and handlers, predicted Foreman would stop Frazier. Ol' Arch says, "George is an excellent fighter. He just needs a little smoothing out."

Madison Square Garden matchmaker Teddy Brenner says, "Foreman is probably the strongest heavyweight champion since Sonny Liston. He's stronger than Joe Louis. He doesn't punch like Louis, but he's stronger."

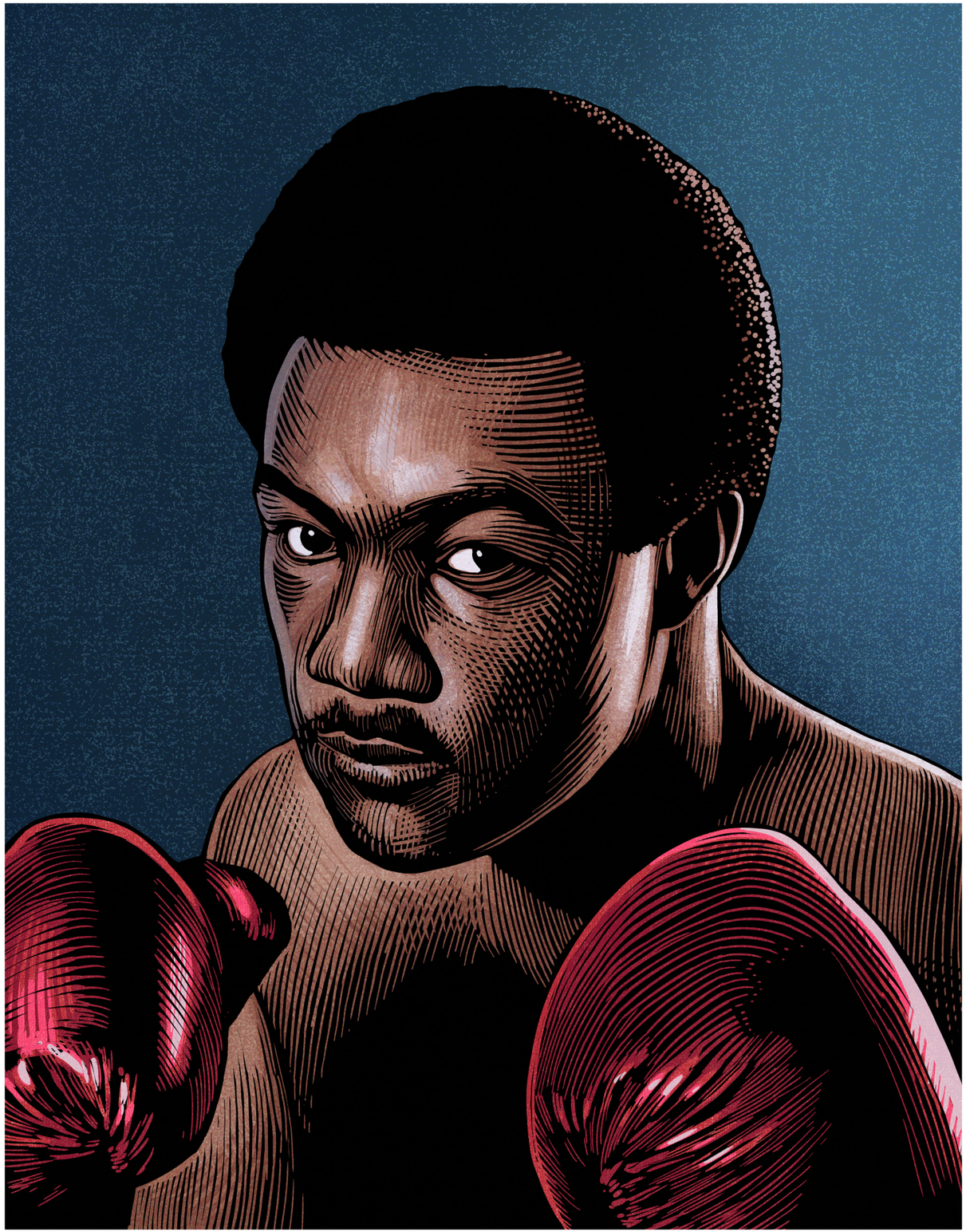
It is true that Foreman is a clubber. He wears his opponents down. Every punch George lands is a hurting punch. He's game, very strong and he's young. Scaling 6-3 and weighing in the neighborhood of 220, Foreman possesses a reach of 78½.

If size, strength and determination alone are the vital factors, then George Foreman will be the heavyweight king for many years to come.

George's thoughts on the heavyweight title itself are very interesting. He knows he can't hold it forever.

"The title belongs to the people, not the individual," he says. "When it's my time to go, I'll exit smiling."

If George keeps on fighting the way he did against Frazier, he'll be around long after the other current pretenders are long gone. RING



GEORGE FOREMAN WAS A HERO TO SOME AND A HERO-SLAYER TO OTHERS – SOMETIMES BOTH – BUT THE SPORT AND THE WORLD LOST A GENUINE ICON AND AN UNDENIABLE ALL-TIME GREAT ON MARCH 21, 2025

By Wallace A. Matthews

NO MORE GRUDGES

On the evening of January 22, 1973, my 16-year-old self despised George Foreman. He had just bounced Joe Frazier off the canvas six times to take the heavyweight title in a shocking upset.

On October 30, 1974, my distaste for Foreman only deepened when he was knocked out by Muhammad Ali in an even more shocking upset.

Over the course of those 19 months, Foreman had two opportunities to curry my favor and he let me down both times. The first time, he had humiliated my boyhood hero, and the second, he was himself humiliated by my hero's superior.

So when, in January 1986, Foreman confided to me over a telephone that he was planning to return to the ring after a 10-year absence, I didn't know whether to laugh, cry or go break a window.

"Now get this right," he had said to me, using his richest and most commanding voice. "I'm coming back for life, liberty and the pursuit of MY happiness."

You could hear by the tone of his voice that the word "my" was in verbal italics. Clearly, there were people in Foreman's orbit who were against this idea. Just as clearly, it wasn't going to matter. Foreman was coming back, whether I or anyone else liked it or not.

By then, I was the boxing writer for Newsday in New York, and ostensibly unbiased toward the people I covered. As such, I was expected to put aside my personal animosity – which was lingering, I must admit – and report my stories fairly and unemotionally.

Plus, as a fight fan and writer who recognized the precarious hold boxing had on the public – we were at the tail end of the Walking Zombies Era of heavyweight boxing and not yet into the Mike Tyson Experience – I instinctively realized that a Foreman comeback, even as a sideshow attraction, was likely to bring renewed attention to the sport.

And not for nothing, I had to admit that the man I spoke to on the phone – we had never met face-to-face – was funny and likable and seemed nothing like the surly monster who had destroyed one of my idols and then failed in his chance to destroy his nemesis.

Still, I wasn't taking the idea of Foreman as an important

Illustration by Chris Wormell

fighter seriously, nor were my editors. We didn't even consider traveling to Sacramento to cover his first comeback fight, against someone named Steve Zouski, an undersized heavyweight who had already been knocked out by Tyson, Tony Tubbs, Marvis Frazier and even Lee Canalito, a bogus heavyweight managed by an even more bogus heavyweight, Sylvester Stallone.

Nor did we travel to Oakland for his second, against an even smaller heavyweight, Charles Hostetter, although I did happen to witness this farce live, having coincidentally been in the Bay Area on vacation at the time.

In fact, we didn't hop onto the George Foreman express until he took on Dwight Muhammad Qawi, the former light heavyweight and cruiserweight champion who as a heavyweight resembled Joe Frazier after a six-month food crawl. By then, George had stopped seven opponents, none of whom you could identify in a lineup and each of whom was significantly outweighed. And even after Foreman stopped a surprisingly resilient Qawi in seven rounds, it was hard to see his comeback as anything more than a traveling medicine show. Even Bob Arum, who once promoted a guy jumping over a canyon in a rocket-powered motorcycle, was calling it "a dog-and-pony show."

Foreman didn't care. He kept rolling up the KOs against the type of guys whose names appear on the wrong side of the records of just about every top heavyweight.

It wasn't until his fight with Gerry Cooney, nearly three years into his comeback, that I began to think that maybe Foreman was onto something there.

Not that I had any great respect for Cooney. As far as I was concerned, he was an artificially pumped-up heavyweight who because of his unusual size and the color of his skin had been sold to the public as some kind of monster. He had been built up in much the same way Foreman was now being rebuilt, only without the big finish. The truth was, despite his impressive record, Cooney was a reluctant warrior who'd had just two "real" fights, against Larry Holmes and Michael Spinks, and was stopped in both.

Still, he was big (6-foot-6) and comparatively young (33, as opposed to Foreman's 41) and even the guys who beat him acknowledged he had a little somethin'-somethin' on his left hook. Besides, Foreman hadn't looked like anything but what he was – a fat, bald, lumbering middle-aged gent – in his now 19 comeback fights.

"Now get this right: I'm coming back for life, liberty and the pursuit of MY happiness."

And it didn't help that I was close with Gil Clancy, who had trained Foreman for his 1977 fight against Jimmy Young, the defeat that sent Foreman into his spiral of despair for the next 10 years, and had witnessed the frightening scene in his dressing room afterward, when a hallucinating Foreman went berserk and needed to be restrained by several men.

"He was like the Schlitz Malt Liquor Bull," matchmaker Bruce Trampler, another witness, told me. "It's the only time in my life I've seen a truly berserk person. Everybody was heading for the hills. He was, I believe, temporarily insane."

Foreman thought the episode was a message from God; Clancy said it was heat exhaustion. The two men had a falling out, and now Clancy was training Cooney.

And Clancy, who had trained Emile Griffith to the welterweight title along with many other top fighters, was positively giddy over Cooney's chances to beat Foreman.

"I've never seen a guy so dedicated and who has worked so hard on a fight as he has," Clancy said. "He's a completely different fighter."

And watching Foreman's training methods, which were unorthodox to say the least – he spent most of the time in his daily workouts facing the overflow crowds, arms on the ring ropes, doing his by-now standard fat old guy comedy routine – only further emboldened Clancy.

"If George somehow pulls this off and wins this fight," he said, "it will set back boxing training 100 years."

But another observer, Mort Sharnik, a former TV executive who had briefly worked as Foreman's publicist and knew his habits, told me, "This can't be it. They've got to be having secret workouts somewhere."

Sharnik knew whereof he spoke. The night before the bout, I had dinner with Clancy at a restaurant on the Atlantic City boardwalk. Walking back through the hotel around 11 p.m., we heard what sounded like the thudding of a heavy bag. We followed our ears to a remote ballroom and, sure enough, there was the notoriously nocturnal and secretive Foreman engaged in an intense late-night workout.

Clancy's normally-tanned face went chalk white. He suddenly realized he had been had. As did Cooney the next night, when George starched him with an uppercut that could have dropped Andre the Giant. What impressed Clancy even more was the pinpoint-accurate five-punch combo Foreman landed to Cooney's face a few seconds earlier.

"I've never even seen Sugar Ray Leonard land a combination like that,' he said.

Foreman's second-round annihilation of Cooney was brutal.

Bettmann

Al Bello

Michael Moorer lost concentration, then consciousness.

But there were more developments in Foreman than merely his once-rudimentary boxing skills. In the 10 years out of the spotlight, he had clearly evolved as a person, too. Where once he was smoldering and openly intimidating to the media, he now was open, friendly and funny with the press. He invited reporters to his ranch in Marshall, Texas, to watch him drag the carcass of a pickup truck around the property.

He was relaxed to the point of comedy even on the day of a fight; on the afternoon of his heavyweight title challenge of Evander Holyfield 15 months and four more KOs after the Cooney massacre, Foreman wandered into the press room to chat while chowing down on the free fried chicken.

Stunned, I remember blurting out, "Don't you have to fight tonight?"

Foreman just laughed. Then he went out and fought a tremendous fight, losing on points to a man more than 10 years his junior.

"I think George simply decided he wanted to be liked," Sharnik said. "He never cared about being liked before, and he never really liked people before. Now he does."

By this point, even I liked him. I had long forgiven him for what he did to Frazier and didn't do to Ali. I looked forward to talking with him because I knew he would usually pick up the phone and always provide good copy.

"That old George, he's gone," Foreman said a few days before the Holyfield fight. "I got his money and his appetite, but that's all."

The difference between the old Foreman and the new was even noticed by his mother, Nancy, who was 82 when I interviewed her a few days before the Holyfield fight. She saw it in his happiness with his fifth wife, Joan.

"Before, he didn't worry about no family," she said, referring to Foreman's four previous marriages. "If he didn't like his woman and baby, he'd just go out and get another. He never did stay with any of them for more than a year. You can tell he's changed because this new wife can stay with him."

And stay with him she did; at the time of his death – in March at age 76 – George and Joan had been married for 40 years.

"I think George simply decided he wanted to be liked."

As competitive as he was in the fight, the loss to Holyfield seemed to put an end to Foreman's quixotic title quest. He beat Alex Stewart a year later but got beat up badly in the process, then lost a decision to Tommy Morrison. Before the Morrison fight, a rumor was floating around that Foreman was going into the tank in exchange for a piece of Morrison, who was being groomed as a Caucasian version of Tyson.

The rumor was so pervasive that a woman at one of his open "workouts" actually went there during the daily Q&A portion. She asked him point blank if it was true he was going to throw the fight.

The old George might have thrown her into the Atlantic Ocean. The new George just laughed. "No, no," he said. "I don't look very good in swim trunks."

Still, he somehow got the call for another shot at the title against Michael Moorer, a southpaw who had recently dethroned Holyfield. Aside from his remaining box office appeal, there was nothing that really qualified Foreman for that title shot. There were far more deserving heavyweights, including Riddick Bowe, who was still an elite force. By then, I was writing for the New York Post and wrote a scathing column ripping Foreman and the fight and picking Moorer to win.

I was also working as a pre- and post-fight analyst for ESPN along with a West Coast-based announcer whose name I will not mention, although he certainly deserves the embarrassment.

On the morning of the fight, my "partner," who was not a boxing guy but was desperate to ingratiate himself with the fighters, took the column to Foreman in an attempt to discredit me with him.

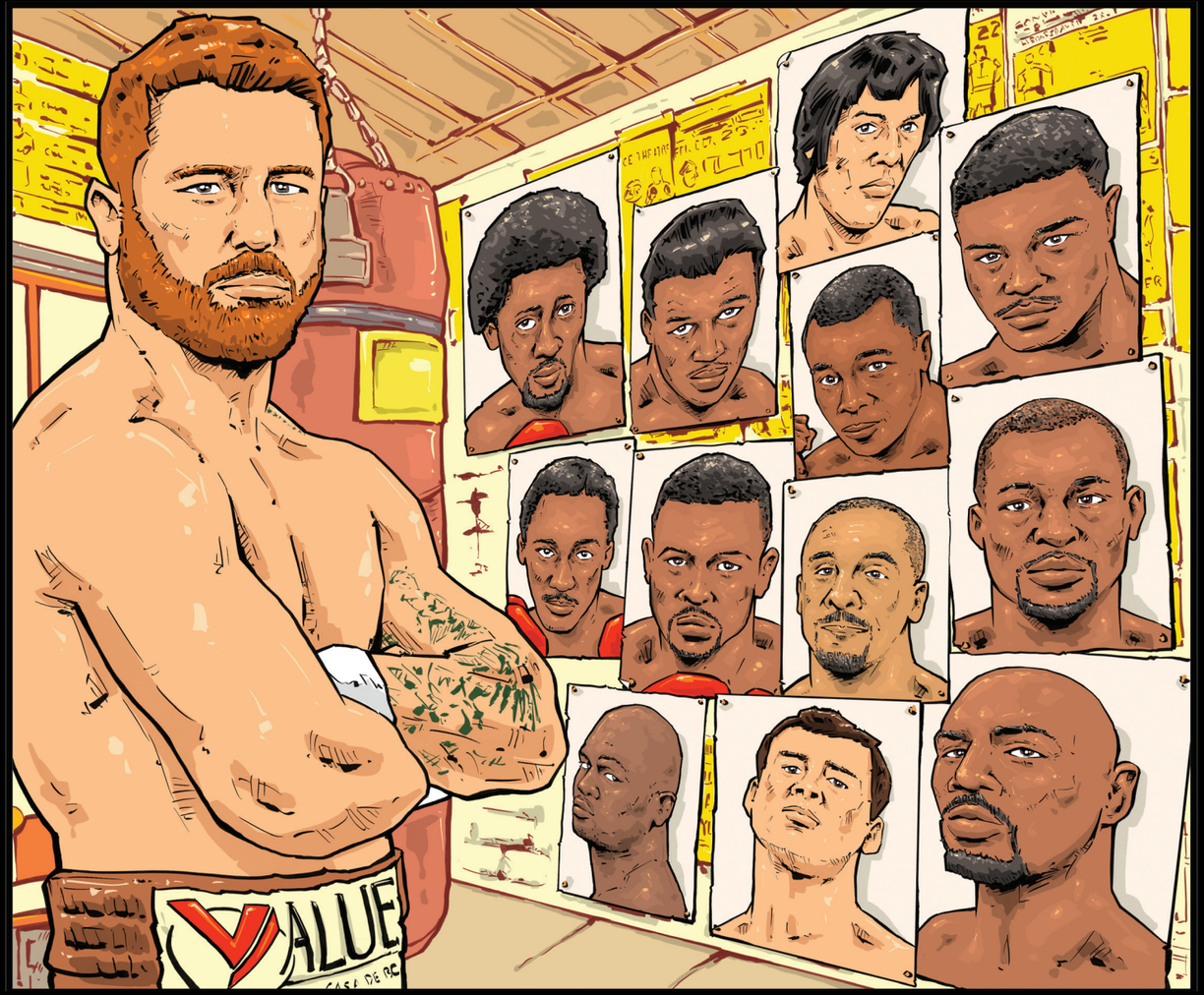
Foreman read the piece, chuckled and handed it back. "So what?" he said. "The guy's my friend. He had to write something."

Foreman had seen the gambit for what it was and wasn't having any of it. My "partner" slunk out of the room. That was as definitive a knockout as any Foreman had scored in the ring.

And that night he climbed into the ring and lost every second of all 9½ rounds before knocking Moorer out with a right hand that traveled no more than six inches. Believe me when I tell you that despite having covered a dozen Super Bowls, the Michael Jordan three-peats, all five Yankees World Series championships and the New York Rangers winning the 1994 Stanley Cup to end a 54-year drought, it was the most thrilling event I had ever covered. I thought the roof would come off the MGM Grand Garden Arena.

Never was I happier to be wrong. And never was I more ashamed of a pre-fight column. George Foreman had now been a pivotal figure in three of the most shocking and improbable knockouts in heavyweight history. I hated him for the first two. I couldn't help but love him for the third. RING

CANELO vs.



THE GREATS

MEXICO'S MODERN-DAY SUPERSTAR TAKES ON TITLEHOLDERS OF THE PAST IN 12 MYTHICAL MATCHUPS

By Anson Wainwright

For almost a decade, Saul "Canelo" Alvarez has been the biggest boxing attraction in North America. The Mexican conqueror has claimed world titles in four divisions – junior middleweight, middleweight, super middleweight and light heavyweight – in a career that already merits first-ballot induction to the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

Canelo's resume is a tour through some of the past and present marquee names in boxing: Shane Mosley (UD 12), Austin Trout (UD 12), Erislandy Lara (SD 12), Miguel Cotto (UD 12), Gennadiy Golovkin (D 12/MD 12/UD 12), Sergey Kovalev (KO 11), Callum Smith (UD 12), Billy Joe Saunders (TKO 8) and Caleb Plant (TKO 11). His two losses were against the elite: a premature attempt to dethrone the vastly more experienced Floyd Mayweather Jr. (L MD 12) and a stylistic nightmare against light heavyweight king Dmitry Bivol (L UD 12).

In bending opponents to his will during his early career, Canelo showed a willingness to fight in the trenches and made liberal use of powerful, accurate body punches, which endeared him to Mexican fans eager to find a successor to the great Julio Cesar Chavez. Through a combination of HBO exposure, youthful aggression and distinctive red hair, Canelo quickly crossed over into the U.S. boxing mainstream, starting in 2011 with a 12-round shutout of Ricky Hatton's little brother, Matthew. Two and a half years later, Canelo picked the wrong night to prove he could box as well as bang, but it's easy to forget that although his record stood at 43-0, he was just 23 years old when he lost to Mayweather. Since then, Canelo has matured and adjusted his style to make use of superlative counterpunching, upper-body movement and high ring IQ to complement his power, pressure and killer instinct, all of which are still very much alive. The Ring Magazine chose Canelo as the Fighter of the Year in both 2019 and 2021.

At press time, the modern-day great was slated to face IBF titlist William Scull in a bid to reunify the undisputed super middleweight championship in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on May 3. Victory will set up a high-stakes superfight with fellow pound-for-pound star Terence Crawford in September.

We enlisted the services of renowned matchmakers Eric Bottjer, Jolene Mizzone and Joe Rotonda to discuss 12 mythical matchups pitting Canelo against the legends of the junior middleweight, middleweight and super middleweight divisions.

CANELO vs. TERRY NORRIS
(at junior middleweight)

Norris might have the lowest pop-culture name recognition among the opponents in this feature, but he is arguably the finest 154-pound champion of all time. The fierce boxer-puncher faced 19 world titleholders during his 12-year pro career, defeating the legendary likes of Sugar Ray Leonard (UD 12) and Donald Curry (KO 8), reigning beltholders Meldrick Taylor (TKO 4), Maurice Blocker (TKO 2) and Paul Vaden (UD 12), as well as future middleweight champs Quincy Taylor (UD 10) and Jorge Castro (UD 12). Norris was a versatile technician blessed with blazing speed and jarring power. The Texan was also hot-tempered, which added to his killer instinct but also made him vulnerable against savvy punchers, such as Julian Jackson (L TKO 2) and Simon Brown (L KO 4), and prone to disqualification losses (Luis Santana twice and Joe Walker).

Eric Bottjer: "At 154 pounds, Canelo was establishing himself as a star and a great fighter. In the early 1990s, Norris did the same, with less star appeal. But in this case, Norris has a bit more. He was a monster – vulnerable, yes, but with incredible speed and power. He gets Canelo in trouble at least once and wins a close decision."

Jolene Mizzone: "I would have to lean towards Canelo on this one. I think that Canelo's style and strength would make all the difference in this fight. Canelo by TKO."

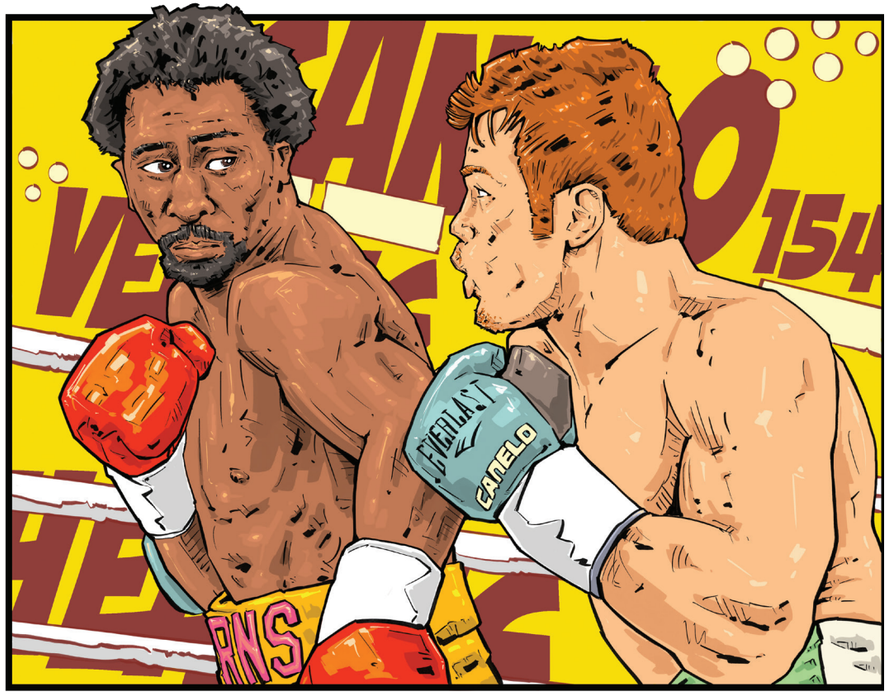
Joe Rotonda: "Love Terry Norris. Similar to Canelo, they are always in entertaining fights. I think Terry will give Canelo fits early on with his speed and unorthodox combinations. I can see him ahead on the scorecards. However, his ability to find himself in reckless exchanges will ultimately lead to a Canelo stoppage later in the fight."

Canelo 2-1

CANELO vs. THOMAS HEARNS
(at junior middleweight)

Standing 6-foot-1 with a 78-inch wingspan, Hearns was freakishly tall and rangy for a welterweight, where he stopped 30 of 32 opponents prior to his epic championship showdown with Sugar Ray Leonard in 1981. Hearns remained world-class as he climbed the divisions, thanks to his large frame, superb punching technique and explosive athleticism,

Illustrations by KronkAAArt



which produced one of the finest jabs and most lethal right hands of the modern era. He etched his name in boxing history by winning world titles in five weight classes (all the way up to light heavyweight), and he achieved immortality with his bold stand against Marvin Hagler during their three-round middleweight war. However, The Hitman's peak years were spent in the junior middleweight division, where he exhibited the skills to outpoint boxing savant Wilfred Benitez and the devastating power to ice the great Roberto Duran in two rounds.

Bottjer: "Hearns tarried in this weight class less than four years, but they were good years. Ask Duran and Benitez. Against Canelo, Hearns gets off the deck to box his way to a competitive decision."
Mizzone: "I think that Hearns would give Canelo a lot of problems early in the fight with his height and his jab, but in the end, I think Canelo would break Hearns down to the body and win a 12-round unanimous decision."
Rotonda: "Hearns will have a significant height and reach advantage here. Canelo has his work cut out for him in this one. It's obvious that for Hearns to win this fight, he must fight long and tall for 12 rounds. He cannot let Canelo work through his jab. I don't think that he can stop Canelo, considering the incredible chin that he possesses, but I do think he will frustrate Canelo with his size, speed and long punches en route to a decision win."

Hearns 2-1

CANELO vs. MIKE McCALLUM
(at junior middleweight)

McCallum fought in the shadow of the Four Kings during much of the 1980s, but the iron-willed technician from Jamaica earned his flowers during a brilliant middleweight run from 1989-1991 – during which time he scored victories over Herol Graham (SD 12), Steve Collins (UD 12), Michael Watson (KO 11) and Sumbu Kalambay (SD 12). McCallum's success led to a showdown with James Toney in late 1991, and the 35-year-old veteran held the emerging middleweight king to a split draw in a brilliant 12-round battle. Toney won the rematch by majority decision. McCallum would go on to win a light heavyweight title, but his prime years were spent in the 154-pound division.

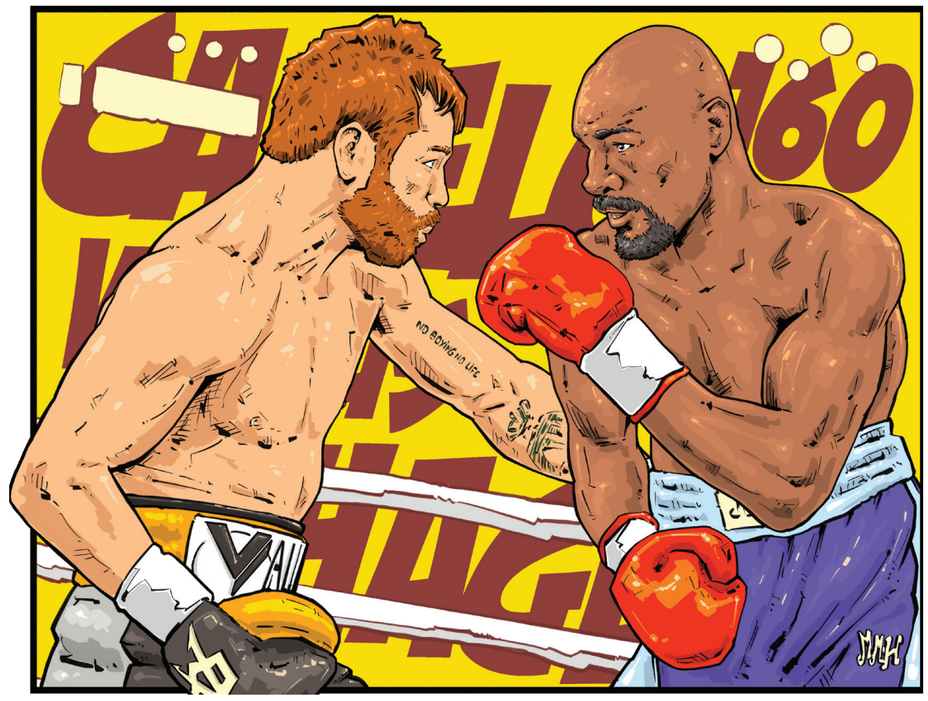
From 1986-1987, the ring-savvy stoic notched knockout wins over Julian Jackson (TKO 2), Milton McCrory (TKO 10) and Donald Curry (KO 5). McCallum was a complete boxer with an excellent jab, power in both hands, a great chin – never stopped in 55 pro bouts – and a debilitating body attack that earned him "The Bodysnatcher" nickname.

Bottjer: "McCallum is an all-timer on anyone's 'underrated' list. Good enough – and not popular enough – for the Four Kings to avoid. As a junior middle, Mike only had 23 fights, none of them signature wins. Canelo wins a tactical match that is close on the cards."
Mizzone: "I think that Canelo's pressure may be too much for McCallum. I do think McCallum will hurt Canelo to the body, but Canelo would make the adjustments and win a 12-round split decision."
Rotonda: "Two fighters with equally incredible chins. Considering both fighters' ability to withstand punches, I am going to assume this fight heads to the scorecards. I think the volume of The Bodysnatcher, as well the body work he so often delivers, would be enough to earn a razor-thin decision over the Mexican legend."

Canelo 2-1

CANELO vs. CARLOS MONZON
(at middleweight)

Considered one of the greatest middleweight champions of all time, Monzon, already a veteran of 79 fights, emerged from South America to dethrone Nino Benvenuti via 12th-round stoppage in 1970. The 6-foot-tall Argentine retired as champion after making 14 title defenses – a division record that stood until 2002 – during a seven-year reign. Monzon was known for his toughness (he was never stopped in 100 pro bouts), stamina (he thrived in the 15-round championship era) and his mean streak, but he possessed underrated skills. He knew how to box tall, stick and move behind a piston-like jab and set up accurate power shots.



Bottjer: "A classic. Canelo takes a lead after 10 rounds and Monzon storms back. Both men are down in the final five rounds and Canelo gets a well-deserved decision that is controversy-free."
Mizzone: "I would have to lean towards Canelo in this one. I think he fought better opposition, which would help him win a 12-round unanimous decision against Monzon."
Rotonda: "Such an interesting fight – guaranteed action for however long it lasts. Monzon has an incredible jab that could be an issue for Canelo throughout the fight, while Canelo's speed and explosiveness could be a problem for Monzon. Carlos is incredible at measuring distance and using his jab to pick apart his opponents, but I just can't help but to think that standing directly in front of Canelo will backfire here. Canelo's speed advantage and countering will allow him to get off on Monzon, and the damage will add up over time. I think Canelo actually gets a stoppage win at some point late in the fight."

Canelo 3-0

CANELO vs. MARVIN HAGLER
(at middleweight)

Hagler established himself as the best 160-pounder in the world during the late 1970s while avoided by the titleholders who succeeded the great Carlos Monzon. The aggressive switch-hitting power boxer bested Philadelphia contenders – Eugene "Cyclone" Hart (TKO 8), Willie "The Worm" Monroe (TKO 12, TKO 2), and "Bad" Bennie Briscoe (UD 10) – as well as 1972 Olympic gold medalist Sugar Ray Seales (TKO 1, UD 10) during the time that Monzon retired and the title passed from Rodrigo Valdes to Hugo Corro to Vito Antuofermo. By

the time Hagler finally got his shot (vs. Antuofermo in 1979), he had 50 pro bouts under his belt. That wait and a controversial 15-round split draw against Antuofermo only added to Hagler's steely resolve. When he traveled to England to challenge Alan Minter for the title in 1980, he chopped "Boom Boom" up in three rounds and reigned over the 160-pound division with an iron fist for the next seven years, defending the title 12 times – including Antuofermo (RTD 4) in a rematch, Roberto Duran (UD 15), Thomas Hearns (TKO 3) and John Mugabi (TKO 11) – before dropping a controversial 12-round split decision to Sugar Ray Leonard. Hagler was a well-schooled, supremely conditioned athlete gifted with inhuman durability (never stopped in 67 pro bouts). He is regarded as one of the best middleweights of all time

Bottjer: "At 160, Canelo is an all-time great, a top-10 guy. So is Hagler. Erislandy Lara and Austin Trout are not Hagler, but they are quality southpaws who were a threat to anyone. Canelo showed in his fights with them that he could box with southpaws. In even matchups with great chins on both guys, it comes down to who is busier. Punch stats point to Hagler. He wins a close decision."
Mizzone: "Hagler, in my opinion, would just be too much for Canelo. I see Hagler giving Canelo problems with his southpaw style. Hagler by TKO."
Rotonda: "So tough to call this one. Two guys with granite chins and incredible power in both hands. I would give Hagler the edge in work rate and volume but then edge Canelo in counterpunching and defense. I have to assume that this fight will go the distance, considering that neither guy has ever been stopped, and edge it to Hagler – just barely. I think his high work rate would get him by in a super-close decision win."

Hagler 3-0

CANELO vs. SUGAR RAY ROBINSON
(at middleweight)

Arguably the greatest boxer of all time, pound for pound, Robinson's prime was at welterweight during the 1940s, but his everlasting legend was forged at middleweight – where he won the world title five times between 1951-1958. Robinson was a physical specimen – tall (5-foot-11) and lithe with the agility and grace of a ballerina, but also dynamic athleticism. He was blessed with speed, one-punch KO power in both hands, and one of the greatest chins of all time (he was only stopped once in 200 pro bouts, and that was due to heat exhaustion in a light heavyweight title bout that he was winning). Adding to those physical gifts was a brilliant boxing mind and a versatility that allowed him to stick-and-move or seek-and-destroy with equal effectiveness. He battled Hall of Fame-enshrined middleweight champions Randy Turpin (L 15, TKO 10), Carlo "Bobo" Olson (KO 12, UD 15, KO 2, KO 4), Rocky Graziano (KO 3), Gene Fullmer (L UD 15, KO 5, split draw 15, L UD 15), and Carmen Basilio (L SD 15, SD 15) when he was past his prime.

Bottjer: "Ray Robinson was a great middleweight – just not the greatest. Canelo wins a very compelling, competitive fight that is in doubt until the end. Robinson is more brilliant, but Canelo is not far behind with his own magic and is slightly more consistent."
Mizzone: "In this day and age, I don't think I would have anyone beating Sugar Ray. He fought anyone, anywhere and was on the short end in a lot of fights. I think he would easily beat Canelo, but the judges would give it to Canelo in the end."
Rotonda: "An obvious dream fight for the die-hards of the sport. The elusiveness of Sugar Ray and the power of Canelo make this fight so interesting. Two fighters that have stayed so active throughout their careers and have consistently fought the best in the world in multiple divisions. I think stylistically this fight is just too much for Canelo. Robinson is incredibly fast and so light on his feet; he should really cruise to a decision win here. It should be noted, though, that Canelo is the stronger fighter, and if he does land something clean, then this fight is over. But I'm going with a decision win for Sugar Ray Robinson."

Canelo 2-1

CANELO vs. SUGAR RAY LEONARD
(at middleweight)

Like his idol Sugar Ray Robinson, Leonard's awesome peak was as a welterweight champ from 1979-1982, but he cemented his status as an all-time great at the tail end of the '80s. Despite undeniable talent and accomplishments, Leonard was the underdog when he challenged undisputed middleweight king Marvin Hagler in 1987. Leonard, now 30, had only fought once since retiring as 147-pound champ in '82 – a ninth-round TKO of Kevin Howard in '84 – and had never fought at 160 pounds. However, he lived up to the "Sugar Ray" moniker with a perfect blend of skill, guts and pizzazz, sticking and moving when he had to, standing his ground when he needed to, and stealing rounds from the slow-starting champion with eye-catching flurries. Leonard won a polarizing 12-round split decision but never defended the title. He stopped light heavyweight beltholder Donny Lalonde at a super middleweight catchweight in '88, winning the WBC's inaugural 168-pound strap, which he defended against arch rivals Thomas Hearns (split draw 12) and Roberto Duran (UD 12) in '89 (although he weighed in at 160 pound for both bouts). At his best, Leonard was a brilliant boxer-puncher with underrated fierceness and resilience.

Bottjer: "At middleweight, Ray was in his 30s, past his prime. He has wonderful moments against Canelo but loses a decision."
Mizzone: "Styles make fights. In this one, I think that Leonard's boxing ability would get the best of Canelo. I think that Leonard would box circles around Canelo. Leonard by 12-round unanimous decision."
Rotonda: "Two contrasting styles between two of the greats. Canelo would have a massive power advantage in this one, while Leonard would have a just-as-significant speed advantage. Both fighters have such high-level ring IQ, it really comes down to who can implement their game plan best. I just can't help but think that the hand and foot speed of Sugar Ray will be too much for Canelo. Obviously Leonard will have to fight a perfect fight for 12 rounds – one shot from Canelo could end it instantly. But I think he will just be too difficult to catch, and Leonard will cruise to a decision win in this one."

Leonard 2-1

CANELO vs. BERNARD HOPKINS
(at middleweight)

An ex-con with a late start to boxing, Hopkins was written off after dropping a decision to Roy Jones Jr. in 1993 (early in both future Hall of Famers' pro careers) but the hard-nosed Philadelphian was steadfast in his quest for middleweight supremacy, winning the IBF belt in 1995 and defending it 12 times before unifying the WBA and WBC titles in 2001 to become the first undisputed middleweight champ since Marvin Hagler. Hopkins, known for his rough-and-tumble technique and tenacity, upset feared and then-undefeated Puerto Rican superstar Felix Trinidad (TKO 12) to achieve that goal.

During his 10-year reign, he defeated several notable opponents, including John David Jackson (TKO 7), Glen Johnson (TKO 11), Antwun Echols (UD 12, TKO 10), Keith Holmes (UD 12), William Joppy (UD 12) and Oscar De La Hoya (KO 9).

Bottjer: "The image of Bernard as a wily boxer who drags you into the muck and takes away your game is a false one here. The 160-pound prime Bernard is an ass-kicker who looks to get you out of there. He doesn't get Canelo out but, like Hagler, is the busier fighter and wins a close decision."
Mizzone: "Hopkins would make it very hard for Canelo to hit him. He would be able to handle Canelo's come-forward style, but in the end, I am going to call a draw in this one."
Rotonda: "I'm not sure how exciting this fight would be, but it is most definitely intriguing, to say the least. Tons of questions going into this fight. Can Hopkins get in the head of Canelo? Can Canelo get through the Philly shell and hurt Bernard? I can see this fight being controversial, regardless of who the winner is and how you score it. I am going to say that Hopkins lands more punches throughout the night, but Canelo's power shots earn him a controversial and super-close decision win in this one."

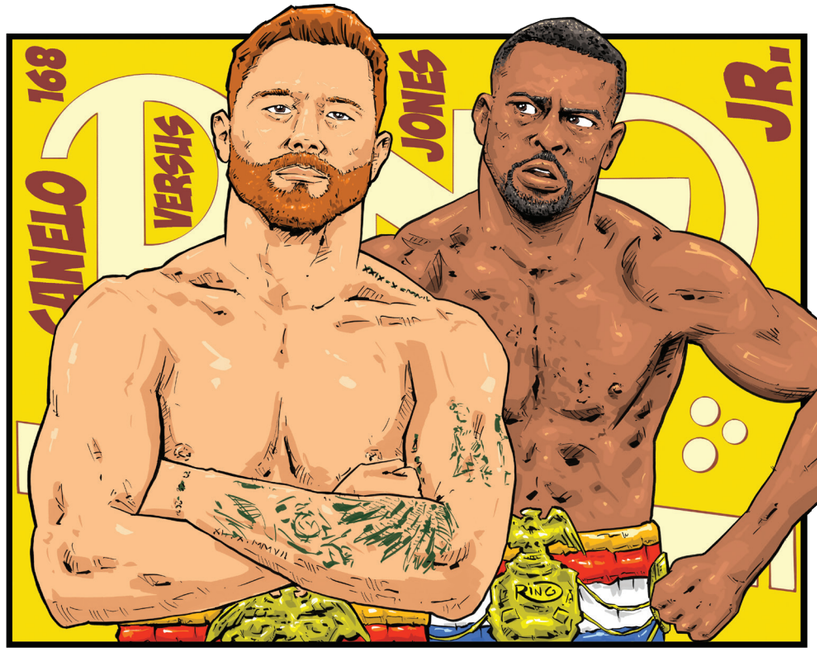
1-1-1

THE RING MAGAZINE CHOSE CANELO AS THE FIGHTER OF THE YEAR IN BOTH 2019 AND 2021.

CANELO vs. ROY JONES JR.
(at super middleweight)

Jones does not have the best resume at super middleweight but many consider the sublimely talented boxer-athlete to be the best 168-pounder in the history of the relatively new weight class. The Pensacola, Florida, native was a dynamo at middleweight, where he briefly held a world title, but he was untouchable at super middleweight, where he undressed then-unbeaten (44-0-2) James Toney over 12 rounds for the IBF belt in 1994. He only reigned for two years but he dominated his competition, which included future super middleweight titleholder Eric Lucas (TKO 11), whom he defeated the same day he participated in a semi-pro basketball game. Jones also stopped Thulani "Sugar Boy" Malinga, another future 168-pound beltholder, in a non-title bout during his middleweight reign.

Bottjer: "I don't think anyone touches Jones at 168. Roy by decision."
Mizzone: "I think in this fight



Canelo would have a hard time hitting Jones. Jones in his prime was a bad man. I would have to go with Roy by 12-round unanimous decision."

Rotonda: "Both of these guys in their prime, this would have been one of the biggest fights in the history of the sport. Roy always did such a good job at fighting tall, also great at switching it up between orthodox and southpaw. On the other hand, Roy leaves himself open for counters, which is super dangerous considering Canelo's ability to counter his opponents. I can see Roy dominating the fight on the scorecards, and ultimately fatiguing late in the fight, where Canelo will catch him and score a stoppage win."

Jones 2-1

CANELO vs. JOE CALZAGHE
(at super middleweight)

Calzaghe quickly came of age during a baptism by fire against wily veteran Chris Eubank (UD 12) for the vacant WBO super middleweight title in 1997. The Welshman won the other major 168-pound belts and earned The Ring championship en route to 21 title defenses over a near 11-year period. Charles Brewer (UD 12), Byron Mitchell (TKO 2), Jeff Lacy (UD 12) and Mikkel Kessler (UD 12) are among Calzaghe's notable 168-pound victories. An indefatigable volume puncher, Calzaghe was a cerebral southpaw with fast hands, fluid footwork and fighting heart.

Bottjer: "Fascinating match. Quantity vs. quality. The quantity man (Calzaghe) adds a huge boxing IQ, and the quality man was never outboxed in this weight class. Calzaghe lands more, but there's no argument when Canelo gets the decision with his eye-catching power shots."

Mizzone: "This is an interesting one. As much as Calzaghe fought the right guys at the right time, he always found a way to win. The question is: Can he handle Canelo's power and come-forward style? I am going to call this one a draw."

Rotonda: "Joe is a southpaw who has incredible stamina, throws wild combinations and is real agile in the ring. Canelo brings raw power in both hands, incredible head movement and a wealth of experience against top opposition. My concern with Joe in this fight is I don't think he can actually hurt Canelo, so in order for him to win this fight, he needs to pitch a shutout. He cannot afford to take any big shots. Joe more often than not finds himself in situations where he is trading shots with his opponents, and I think that backfires here. I have Canelo catching him at some point in the fight and getting a stoppage win."

Canelo: 2-0-1

CANELO vs. JAMES TONEY
(at super middleweight)

Toney's whirlwind middleweight title reign – consisting of six defenses in 15 months – was special, but the quick-tempered Michigan native came of age during his super middleweight run that took off with his brilliantly brutal defeat of defending IBF beltholder Iran Barkley (TKO 9) in early 1993. The 168-pound weight limit was healthier for Toney, who battled the scale at middleweight. The surly counterpuncher displayed savage ring savvy in three super middleweight title defenses that he mixed in with an astounding seven non-title bouts in just under 18 months. Toney was a throwback fighter in terms of his ring craft and his ring activity. His final successful title defense vs. rugged former light heavyweight beltholder Prince Charles Williams (KO 12) is a perfect example of Toney's punishing prime.

Bottjer: "There are times when Toney makes Canelo miss with every punch in his combinations. They fight in close, yet it's tactical. Canelo is just a bit more consistent and wins a close decision."

Mizzone: "I see Canelo having an easier time with Toney, with Canelo's come-forward style. I see Toney down from a body shot in the third round but getting up. Canelo by 12-round unanimous decision."

Rotonda: "Both have granite chins and both are very good defensively. I can see Toney frustrating Canelo with his movement and counterpunching. I think stylistically this is not a favorable fight for Canelo; he is going to have a much more difficult time landing clean on Toney than people realize. I am going with a decision win for James Toney."

Canelo 2-1

CANELO vs. ANDRE WARD
(at super middleweight)

Ward, who claimed gold at the 2004 Olympics (the last American male boxer to do so), took a few years to find his pro legs at middleweight, but the cerebral Bay Area boxer came of age during the Super Six World Boxing Classic 168-pound tournament that began in 2009. Ward bested (in order) Mikkel Kessler (TD 11 – to win the WBA title), Allan Green (UD 12), Sakio Bika (UD 12 – outside of the tournament) and Arthur Abraham (UD 12) before unifying belts with WBC ruler Carl Froch (UD 12) in the final to earn the vacant Ring Magazine championship. Ward was a consummate technician with underrated toughness and a mean streak that occasionally manifested with sneaky (and effective) roughhouse tactics.

Bottjer: "For once, Canelo experiences frustration. He can't solve Ward, who is as unpredictable with his punches as a jazz player in full flight. The fight is not good for anybody, except for Ward, who takes a decision."

Mizzone: "This may be one of the easiest to pick. I think Ward would box circles around Canelo, like what Bivol did to Canelo. Ward by 12-round unanimous decision."

Rotonda: "Stylistically, two high-level fighters with completely different styles. I don't think we're looking at the most exciting fight in the world, but I think we would see why Andre Ward is known to have such a high fight IQ. Ward has been in with big punchers; I don't think he would physically break Canelo down, but I think he would stay on the outside and box his way to a decision win."

Ward: 3-0

(Canelo win)-(Legend win)-(Draw)
Bottjer: 6-6-0 Mizzone: 6-4-2
Rotonda: 5-7-0 RING

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk, and you can follow him on X @AnsonWainwr1ght.

THE NEW ATOMIC AGE

FORMER HEAVYWEIGHT TITLEHOLDER **OLIVER McCALL** DISCUSSES RELATIONSHIPS, REDEMPTION ARCS AND A COMEBACK AT AGE 59

By Ted Kluck

Inset: Mirrorpix

Music City Boxing is a working boxing gym, located at the top of a hill in a Nashville neighborhood that is equal parts "gentrifying" and industrial. It is a gym in the vein of the Stillman's and Kronk of old (but much cleaner), and when I arrive there to meet Oliver McCall, there are a handful of local pros working on their craft. There's an older white guy in jeans – a managerial type – riding slowly on an assault bike and talking on a cell phone. There are plenty of gyms in Nashville where Brentwood soccer moms can take a cardio class or hipster real-estate mavens can work up a sweat on the pads between deals. This is not that gym. Opened originally

Photography Tim Fikes | Diamond House Media

as a home base for former super middleweight titleholder Caleb Plant, this is a boxing laboratory.

The moment I shake McCall's massive right hand, I discover what will become a theme of the afternoon: that there is a wide chasm between "good athlete" and "world class." McCall's fist is large and heavy. I will feel it in the ring later, connecting with my chin. His body is still covered with slabs of muscle and, despite a lifetime spent fighting and an era of heavy drug use that started in 1984 (I was 6 years old) and ended in 2012, he is something of a medical anomaly. McCall has never had an operation of any kind and cleared his neurological exam with flying colors. His body looks better at 59 than mine ever looked on my best day.

McCall has only ever trusted two men to wrap his hands – heavyweight legend Joe Frazier and Music City owner Stephen Grand. "It's the widest handwrap I've ever seen," explains Grand, gesturing to McCall's expansive knuckle pads behind a desk.

My grandfather smoked several packs of Marlboro Reds each day. He was a tool-and-die man – from Chicago like Oliver McCall, and a fighter like Oliver McCall. He ate steak every night for dinner and I don't think I ever saw him eat a vegetable. He was the patriarch of our family and when he was 59, none of us questioned his motives or his ideas, even if we thought them unwise.

At 59 years of age, McCall – former WBC heavyweight champion, former Mike Tyson sparring partner and former vanquisher of Lennox Lewis with a wicked right hand – won two professional boxing matches, both TKOs, against aging journeymen Stacy Frazier and Gary Cobia. One read of this – that which is popular among comments section denizens ("haters," per a smiling McCall) – is that it's not safe for a 59-year-old to fight professionally and that it shouldn't happen. Another read, of course, is that it's really not safe for *anyone* to fight professionally in what is a hurt business and a head trauma business.

A third read, and my personal favorite, is that boxing has always operated (for better or worse) under a strong "if the market will bear it" ethic, which is how full-time-marketer and part-time-boxer-come-lately Jake Paul ended up in a ring, in a massive stadium, in front of a Netflix audience against a 58-year-old version of Tyson. It's why we all watched that fight against our better judgment, and why my college students got to experience an unlikely and counterfeit version of a Mike Tyson Fight Night.

It's part of what now drives McCall, who launched his comeback well before the Tyson/Paul gentleman's agreement.

"We're taking calls from David Tua, Bruce Seldon and of course Shannon Briggs, who wants to fight anybody and everybody," says a member of McCall's camp, rattling off a who's who of 1990s heavyweight names. "They all want to be the first to knock him out." In 77 pro fights, and countless sparring sessions, the inexplicably rugged McCall has never been knocked down or stopped. I ask him to what he attributes his unusual chin. "Only the grace of God," he says.

Boxing, for all its seediness, is also a sport of deep and sometimes inextricable relationships forged over time. A younger version of manager-turned-promoter Jimmy Adams has been visible at McCall's shoulder – often next to Don King – in many an old fight film. In one particularly tender moment – during the first Lennox Lewis ring walk – he can be seen wiping away McCall's tears as the fighter made his way to the ring. A walk which was often emotional for McCall.

"I had to work myself up!" McCall says of his tearful ring walks. I ask him about fear. "Of course I was afraid!" he says. "But it was controlled fear! The fear became energy!"

It's an energy – and a lifelong addiction that has outlasted his others – that has reunited him with Adams and brought him to Nashville to fight on his friend's twice-monthly cards.

"That's what brings me here!" explains a joyful McCall, wearing a red Atomic Bull T-shirt and red workout shorts. He's perhaps the most kinetic person I've ever interviewed. His metal folding chair creeps ever closer to mine during our conversation as he slips, bobs and weaves imaginary punches mid-story. He works up a little sweat just by talking.

Today I might be sparring with Oliver McCall, which may not be a great life choice for me, at age 48. There are a lot of "formers" in front of my name as well. Former college football player. Former sparring partner for a heavyweight pro and dear friend (Sam Comming – see: boxing and relationships). Former author of *Facing Tyson: Fifteen Fighters, Fifteen Stories*. There's a scary thing that happens in middle-age where you become known more for your formers. This is, perhaps, what compels McCall back into the ring and, at some level, compels me to want to do this.

He's had an odd career in that he is perhaps best *known* for his sparring. Namely, the fact that he was Mike Tyson's chief sparring partner and once put a prime Tyson on the canvas in a session.

"Me and Mike was cool," he says of his relationship with the legendary heavyweight, whom he knocked down in training for the Michael Spinks fight. McCall relates a story in which he was fighting on a card in Chicago that was attended by Tyson and Don King. "I knocked my opponent out," McCall explains. "Knocked him through the ropes. I walked over to where Mike was sitting and said, 'I'll knock you out like that too!'"

He became a Tyson sparring partner the next day and showed no fear. "I charged across the ring to *his* corner," he says of their first sparring session. "And they gave me a $500 raise on the spot!"

McCall's professional apex came in a surprising 1994 victory at Wembley Arena over Lennox Lewis in which he caught the WBC titleholder with a right

hand, sending him to the canvas. Referee Guadalupe Garcia decided Lewis wasn't fit to continue and awarded the second-round TKO to McCall. It is a version of that selfsame right hand that I'll be facing today. They say that power is the last thing to go.

Through it all, the one constant was drug use. A vandalism and disorderly conduct charge. Stints in rehab. A stay at a psychiatric hospital. "It was controlled using," explains McCall, who remembers exactly where he was when he first tried crack cocaine. "The building is still there. 39th and Indiana, in Chicago," he says. McCall is a stickler for exact dates and addresses. "I felt like I had no cares in the world. It was euphoria. But the drugs and the addictions are trying to destroy you … to kill you."

The second Lewis fight, finally contested in February of 1997 at the Las Vegas Hilton, was creatively billed "Payback or Playback" and was (to say the least) theatre of the bizarre. The ringwalks were shockingly minimalistic compared to today's versions. Lewis walked to the ring in only his trunks, gloves and shoes. Noteworthy was the fact that trainer Emanuel Steward worked with McCall in the previous fight and with Lewis in the rematch, which had never before happened on a championship stage. McCall was a 3-to-1 underdog – a function of looking lethargic against a 45-year-old Larry Holmes and positively listless in a loss to Frank Bruno.

McCall had promised to delay his own ringwalk and make Lewis wait for him in the ring, but instead sprinted to the ring, leaping up onto the canvas. "I wanted to do something different," McCall says of his ring-run. As a result of his drug charges, McCall was not allowed to have any family present for the fight, or "they would arrest me immediately."

"I begged my daughter Tawanna not to look at the fight," McCall remembers.

The aging warrior still packs a punch and has never been down.

His plea was a portent of the bad things to come.

When Michael Buffer announced his name, McCall used both gloves to slick back his hair in a move that struck me as quaint and, frankly, kind of cool, as is Las Vegas and the 1990s in general. Adams, as always, was at his elbow. In the middle of the first round, George Foreman – the lineal heavyweight champ at the time (at age 48) and HBO Sports' expert commentator – indicated, prophetically, that Lewis could win the fight with his long left jab. He would do so, but not in the way that anyone could have predicted.

Lewis controlled the fight for three rounds, with McCall offering little in the way of offense. Following the third, McCall walked in circles

around the ring, refusing trainer George Benton's pleas to return to his corner. "McCall is doing a very strange thing here, folks," said Larry Merchant on the call, stating the obvious. "I wonder if that's against the rules or not," added Foreman. McCall wandered and gazed out into the audience in a posture that was equal parts bewilderment and honesty. He was doing, I suppose, what we all do when faced with an impossible task: We spin our literal and figurative wheels.

"I could see where Lennox's momma was sitting at ringside," he says. "I saw her cheering for him, and I thought of my own mother not being able to be there. I sort of went into a trance."

As the fourth round unfolded, McCall walked around, guard down, shaking his head and occasionally turning his back on the confused Lewis, who responded with what looked like both confusion and compassion.

"This man's mind is gone," said Benton to Merchant. "Have you ever seen anything like this in your life?"

After Round 4, McCall wept.

Referee Mills Lane knelt in his corner in a posture that I can only describe as "fatherly," asking McCall if he wanted to continue. Lane waved off the fight early in Round 5.

"I've seen some strange things in boxing," said Merchant. "That is certainly one of the strangest."

Merchant opened his interview with, "Lennox, congratulations … I guess."

"After the fight, I said, 'Y'all got what y'all want, now can you leave me alone?'" McCall remembers. "It made me feel bad."

The conversation between HBO announcer Jim Lampley and Foreman immediately post-bout encapsulates an incredibly prescient, human and decent bit of journalism. I found myself thankful, for McCall's sake, that we didn't have social media in 1997, as it would have made a bad situation worse.

"This guy has had a painful life," Foreman explained. "He's been in and out of counseling for drugs, and believe me, there are a great many people in the same [state] he's in … I wanted to just get up there and embrace him and let him know it's going to be OK."

"Let's hope he can continue to pursue the path of religion in which he now believes, and that that can be the reconstructive mechanism in his life," Lampley said.

"This guy is in bad shape and he needs us," Foreman said.

It was sweet.

Recovery is rarely linear, and this has certainly been the case for McCall. He was baptized at age 12 in Chicago by the uncle of singer Lou Rawls. "God has kept me, by grace, through my ignorance," he says of the drug years.

His mother died a year after he got clean.

McCall had an emotional breakdown during the Lewis rematch.

"Were you tempted to use, that night?" I ask him. His eyes well up with tears and he tells a story of walking to a bodega in Racine, Wisconsin, where he could have scored junk … but didn't. "It was the Holy Spirit keeping me," he says.

Part of his redemption, as an older man, has included fighting on professional cards with his son, Elijah. "There's no joy like fighting, and winning, on a pro card with my son!" he says. "I was his trainer and I worked my son's corner, and then I walked into the room, changed, and then I came out and won my fight! It was awesome. Those two fights were probably the most exciting fights of my career, Lord knows."

Nick Laham

McCall is still fit and fight-ready at nearly 60 years old.

When I come out of the dressing room in my gear, McCall is in the ring, now shirtless, working the mitts, in a vintage pair of Atomic Bull fight satins. He is sweating profusely, and a few of the gathered boxing lifers – including coach Nettles Nasser – marvel at his speed and power. In a gym full of young alphas, McCall is still the one all of them stop to admire.

I am, of course, far from the first writer to suggest this sort of thing. Norman Mailer famously sparred Jose Torres many times. Hemingway, it seemed, sparred with anyone who was willing. My personal favorite, George Plimpton, wrote of his sparring session with Archie Moore in *Shadow Box*. I sparred with my heavyweight friend weekly in my early 30s, in a ring in the basement of our home, with our kids playing video games on an adjacent sofa and my wife coming down occasionally to get some meat out of a basement freezer as Sam battered me around the ring and taught me everything he knows.

I trained for this particular engagement at age 48 by battling the flu for a month, which still had me wheezing at night, sounding not unlike a kitten meowing. Not an especially empowering thought.

"Let me show you some ring generalship," says McCall after a long session of rope-skipping (he skips like a teenager), shadowboxing and mitt work. I have never felt more inadequate, athletically, as I hit a heavy bag with one eye trained on McCall in the ring.

Once I join him, our headgear never comes on, but McCall works me around the ring in a light, technical spar, teaching me (a freshman) a doctorate-level class on heavyweight boxing, counterpunching and defense. He chins me with an uppercut and I feel a fraction of the heavy right hand that stopped Lennox Lewis. His ability to avoid my feeble right hand, step to his left and then batter my exposed ribs is stunning. This is what world-class feels like. I'm 6-foot-2 and a strong (albeit chubby) 250, but I feel like a child playing one-on-one in the driveway against my father. There were a handful of moments where he could have sent me home in the back of an ambulance, if he'd so desired.

A popular boxing adage is that Father Time is undefeated. But I wouldn't bet against The Atomic Bull.

Ted Kluck is the author of 30 books and teaches journalism at Union University.

KATIE TAYLOR MIGHT SEEM TOO NICE TO BE A FIGHTER IN PERSON, BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE: SHE AIMS TO CONTINUE HER UNPRECEDENTED BLOOD-AND-GUTS CONQUEST IN THE RING

By Adam Smith

TENDER

Warrior

"People have definitely not seen the best of me yet. I think they have seen glimpses, but certainly not the best of me, and that is so exciting. It keeps me going. You will see this in the future, the next fight I hope."

Really?!

After 28 years of dedicating her entire life to boxing – and winning more trophies and titles than virtually any fighter ever – we haven't yet seen the best Katie Taylor?

I actually spilled the afternoon tea we were sharing at a quiet reunion in the heart of London.

Katie is my friend. We have been close for many years – she has been to visit my family, and my children have all been to see her fight – so I know KT well. But she never ceases to amaze me.

Like she did carrying the Irish flag when she lit up London in 2012 – becoming one of the iconic figures of those sensational Olympics.

This stands high above all her amazing memories:

"For sure, the Olympic gold medal here in London was the one," Katie told me.

"The pressure, people have no idea – the weight on my shoulders. I was the hot favorite. I was expected to come back with the Olympic medal. All the Irish had booked tickets months in advance for the final.

"I had to win. There was no way I couldn't. I was fighting for them. And winning an Olympic gold medal in front of 10,000 Irish people was the one. To finally stand up on the top of the podium, with the Irish flag going up, hearing the anthem, getting the gold medal – so special."

I implore you to dig out the incredible pictures of Katie's homecoming to Bray, the coastal town in County Wicklow; they will blow you away.

KT remains hopeful that one day she will fill up Dublin's Croke Park:

"It would be really amazing – 90,000 or whatever they can pack in! We have had talks over the last few years; I am still clinging on to hope that will happen."

I have admired and been inspired by Katie Taylor for a very long time – and there is always a new challenge, something deep inside waiting to ignite. This relentless nature of continually defying normal rules. Rather like another fighter she holds in the highest esteem:

"Oleksandr Usyk is just phenomenal," Katie told me.

She is in awe of her fellow pound-for pound great, who also shone brightly in the London Olympics and, like Taylor, is adored by the people.

"Usyk's beaten Joshua twice, he's beaten Fury twice, and he's only really a cruiserweight," Katie explained. "What he has done for the sport – with such class – it's amazing. We both won gold medals in 2012; we have the history together. And to see the two of us progress in the pro ranks – same generation."

"It doesn't matter whether you are fighting in front of 10 people or 10,000 or 100 million; I am there to give it my all."

Together they are the epitome of all that is great about boxing and stand as wonderful role models. They are so dedicated, so humble, and at 38, both are still on top!

Taylor will actually have turned 39 when she enters the ring on July 11 to face superb multi-weight champion Amanda Serrano once again.

Fueled by her punishing training regime, Taylor is counting down to this epic third fight with Serrano in New York. The Irish on the East Coast will be back out in droves to see the finest of boxing dance partners reunite, which will bring us a mesmerizing climax to one of the greatest of modern rivalries.

It's all systems go in a series that just seems to get better and better.

Their first cracker in April 2022 – with Taylor winning by split decision – was followed by that scintillating rematch last November on Netflix. As the co-main event to Mike Tyson vs. Jake Paul, it far surpassed every women's sporting event in U.S. history by garnering an average of 74 million viewers globally, according to the streaming platform. Katie loved being involved, but to her, a ring is a ring:

"It doesn't matter whether you are fighting in front of 10 people or 10,000 or 100 million; I am there to give it my all. It is amazing to sit back seeing the figures afterwards, but as far as my mindset going into those fights, it doesn't change, no matter who is watching."

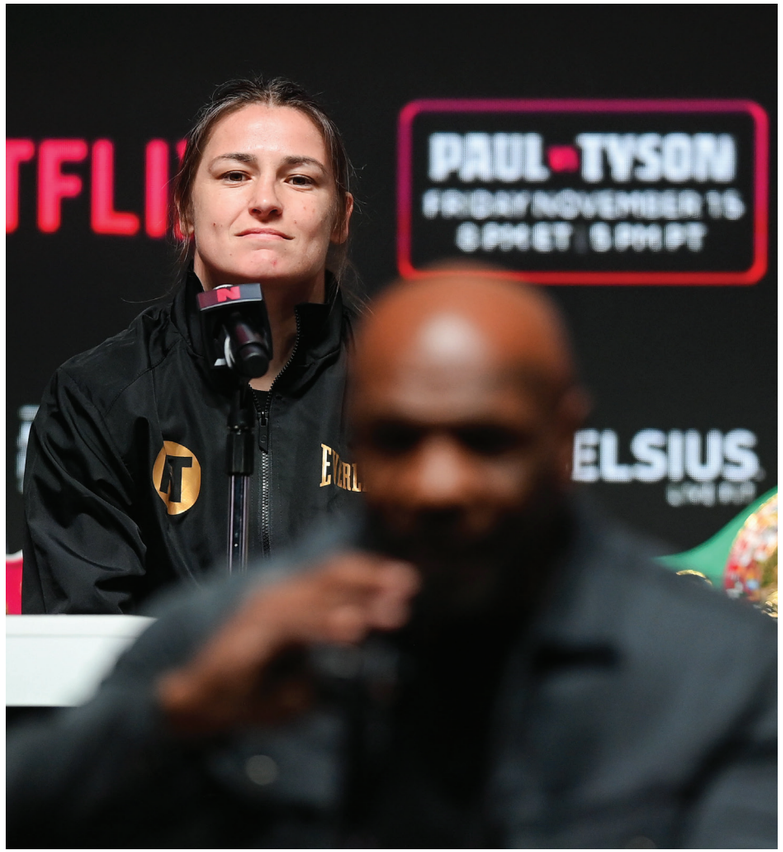
Taylor won by unanimous decision despite a point deduction for headbutts, leading to much controversy. Unfounded, according to Taylor herself:

"I absolutely did win the fights. There is no doubt. This is boxing. People have their opinions and people have their favorites, but there is no doubt I did win those fights. You listen to what Teddy Atlas says, Andre Ward, the greats who I respect, and they all had me winning. So people can listen to a random person on the street in comparison to an absolute legend – those who really know what they are talking about. Most people who know what they are talking about had me winning both fights."

Katie went on: "Our styles blend very well. We've shared the ring for 20 rounds – each round was a close round. Very little separates the two of us. Two great champions stepping into the ring."

And so they will again, in their own right – not "supporting Tyson-Paul."

"The whole event was definitely bizarre, but it was absolutely amazing to meet and talk to Mike Tyson throughout the lead-up," Katie continued.



Stephen McCarthy

Sharing a card with Mike Tyson was surreal but exhilerating, says Taylor.

"Having a chance to sit down with an icon of the sport was so special. I love the fact that he walked into the ring with a black robe – no music on. I pinch myself now to say I have been on the undercard of Mike Tyson. Never in a million years did I think I would be on the undercard of a legend of the sport. I am so grateful that I have had these opportunities and that God has opened up these doors for me. Every morning, I thank God for this amazing life."

These days, Katie lives a quiet one in Connecticut – and her home is a short ride from where the Smith family descends on Cape Cod every year.

There, back in the harsh winters of the '80s, Marvelous Marvin Hagler honed his body in isolation, in preparation for his magnificent reign as middleweight king; today, the Cape is a serene hideaway.

A few years back, Katie came to visit us at my dad's summer home in Chatham, Massachusetts. On a golden August afternoon with the herons flying low, the sky was an electric blue and a Grady-White idled in the mystical Cape Cod waters.

"Your turn, KT," I said from the safety of the boat as my brothers lobbed the skis over the engine.

And there she was, lying helplessly in the wake, the iconic figure of Katie Taylor: a jewel of the Emerald Isle. One of the greatest to ever lace them up.

But this wasn't her pugilistic comfort zone. No gloves – merely holding on with her bare hands to the flimsy handle of a tired rope. No boxing boots – just those dancing feet forced into ill-fitting water skis.

"Only a couple of Great Whites spotted in the Cape this year!" I said, half-jokingly.

For this is very much shark territory. A few seals bobbed around – ideal targets for the most feared of the elasmobranch fish.

It was the rare moment in which the warrior relinquished her position at the top of the food chain, but Katie was desperate to follow my siblings and glide through Chatham's wild waterways.

The engine revved, the rope went taut, and Katie fought to stand as she was dragged through the water. Almost up. Not quite. Rope gone. Down. Take two.

Take three. Take four … five … six. But as hard as she tried, she just couldn't get up.

"More," she shouted as she languished alone in the cool water. "I have to do this!"

Katie could have stayed, on and on, until the sun had long set over Crow's Pond, but she conceded to a rare defeat.

For almost three decades, striving in battle, Katie Taylor has tested herself against the very best, possessing this remarkable inner spirit and a ferocious drive that takes her body to extraordinary places, time and again. Perseverance. The challenge.

So she might not have taken to the water as the ducks do, but oh my, did she give it a go. How much she wanted it.

Katie dried herself off, cuddled up to my youngest daughter, Tilly, and, although disappointed, thoroughly enjoyed the rest of the Smiths' boating trip before challenging us to table tennis!

This was the first time that my father, Alan, had met Katie. To this day, I don't

Taylor-Serrano 2 was the real fight at the AT&T Stadium.

think he can actually comprehend quite what she has achieved in a boxing ring. Saying that, I'm not sure any of us in the sport still really understand how unbelievable Katie Taylor is.

Dressing up as a boy just to enter competitions before capturing an unprecedented six European championships, five Worlds and the Olympic gold that made her the best female amateur of them all.

For Katie to then lead the revolution of female boxing, become the undisputed world lightweight and junior welterweight champion, shining in so many breathtaking fights, puts her right up there with the best sportswomen in any sport of any era.

"Are you really a boxer?" I remember my dad asking her.

Katie is so gentle that anyone who hasn't seen her fight would never guess what she does.

That summer evening on the Cape, she slipped into the boisterous family environment with her light Irish humor – showing that she takes on any situation.

"When are you coming back?" I asked her as she tucked into a particularly rare cheesecake treat back in that London tea room.

"I'd love to see your family – but Adam, let's get this Serrano trilogy finished first!"

"Was your family really the key for you, Katie?" I wondered.

"My family has been amazing," she said. "My parents told me as a young girl that I would change boxing. My brothers and sister are my biggest supporters; they never miss a fight. I wouldn't be here without that family support.

The hardships that Katie faced as a 10-, 11-year-old unable to fight "as a girl" were extraordinary. The Taylor family always believed in her, and early amateur tournaments and sparring sessions in all parts of the world molded her.

"I'll tell you what really made me who I am today," she continued.

"The old training camps with all the Russians, the Ukrainians – and I was the only female fighter there. Every time I went to spar, they were all sniggering and laughing, saying this guy has to go in with a girl. I had to prove myself every single time, and that prepared me for all the big fights I have today. I am so grateful I went through that. But at the same time, I am so grateful that no other female fighter has to go through that. It was a hard road but made me so much stronger mentally and physically. Some of those spars were harder than any one of my fights. They were wars."

Back in November 2006, Taylor won her first amateur world championship, then reaffirmed her reign every two years before losing to Estelle Mossely at the beginning of 2016. Before that defeat, Katie had been World Amateur Champion for 3,470 days!

Katie then won her first professional world title in October 2017 and hasn't been without a belt since then – that's almost 3,000 days!

Thousands of days – close to HALF of her life – as a reigning champion.

"Looking back, it was amazing to fight as a young girl and then turn pro," Katie said.

"Women's boxing was nonexistent. We were all getting paid pennies. Fast-forward nine years later, and it's on a whole new level. I am proud to say that we headlined Madison Square Garden, and we achieved the first million-dollar purse that women's boxing always wanted. Looking at the next generation, they are going to be even better than us, and I can't wait to watch them!"

Katie was on a roll.

"Sometimes I am very surprised by the adoration. But if I have the chance to inspire one person in my life, that makes all the hard work, the punches, the early mornings, the treacherous training camps worth it. That's the most satisfying part of the whole journey, knowing that young girls with dreams won't have to go through the same struggles that I went through. The likes of Deirdre Gogarty, Laila Ali, Christy Martin, Lucia Rijker, Ann Wolfe, Jane Couch ... all paved the way, and that's everything for me, much more important than any belt or medal – making the road easier for the next generation."

Audiences and times were thankfully beginning to change around 2016. When Katie turned professional under Eddie Hearn, broadcaster Sky Sports began to really invest in the growth of women's boxing with Taylor as the matriarch. Natasha Jonas, Savannah Marshall, Terri Harper and others followed. Women's boxing ascended to a totally new level.

"How much does the fire honestly still burn?" I asked Katie.

"I wouldn't still be boxing if the fire wasn't there," she exclaimed.

"It's the reason I am still in the sport. I wake up so grateful that I do something I absolutely love every single day – the cold runs, the ups and downs of training camps, when I feel myself getting ready for a fight. If there ever was a time I wasn't, I would hang up the gloves."

Katie had remained unbeaten as a professional until she faced Chantelle Cameron in May 2023. That defeat in front of her Irish faithful was obviously hard to take.

"Sometimes I am very surprised by the adoration. But if I have the chance to inspire one person in my life, that makes all the hard work, the punches, the early mornings, the treacherous training camps worth it."

"Did you think about it after your sole loss to Chantelle?" I asked.

"I was heartbroken, like any fighter. I thought she won the fight. She was the better person. The fight was on a Saturday night. Sunday, Monday rest and I was back in the gym Tuesday, preparing for the rematch. I don't sit there feeling sorry for myself. I knew what I needed to do for the rematch. I got it back in great fashion and I am very, very proud of it. That was make or break, and revenge was very, very sweet. I would love to have the Cameron trilogy."

With Turki Alalshikh changing the whole landscape of boxing, surely a megamatch out in Saudi Arabia is still on the to-do list.

"I would love the opportunity to fight in Riyadh," Katie told me.

"What Turki's doing – making all these incredible fights happen and opening up the doors to so many boxers – there's too many fights that didn't happen a few years ago, and now we are seeing the best fighting the best. It's exactly what boxing needed. These huge 50/50 fights are happening, and it's amazing to see. I hope he gives female fighters more. I would love to fight there!"

With the cheesecake finished and the tea lukewarm, there was just time to talk about life after sport – an area that fascinates me, especially with someone like Katie who is so obsessed with boxing.

"Every now and then I think about it, as I know I can't do this forever," she admitted.

"I don't want to get punched in the face for the rest of my life. Maybe coaching or managing. When I hang up the gloves, I will have a clearer direction. I am not going to be one of those people who will just sit back and do nothing. I want a purpose in life, a challenge to get me up again, and I will need that when I retire from the sport."

However, after around 250 amateur bouts (she won 169 of 179 officially, but many early ones were unsanctioned against boys) and 25 professional fights, Katie Taylor is absolutely convinced her finest performances are still ahead:

"I'm telling you, Adam, people haven't seen the best of me. I am excited to showcase what this year will bring."

As our precious time came to an end and Katie departed for other promotional activities in London, I was left to wonder what lies ahead for her.

She is of course welcome back any summer to take on the skis and the sharks again.

Write Katie Taylor off at your peril. RING

Al Bello

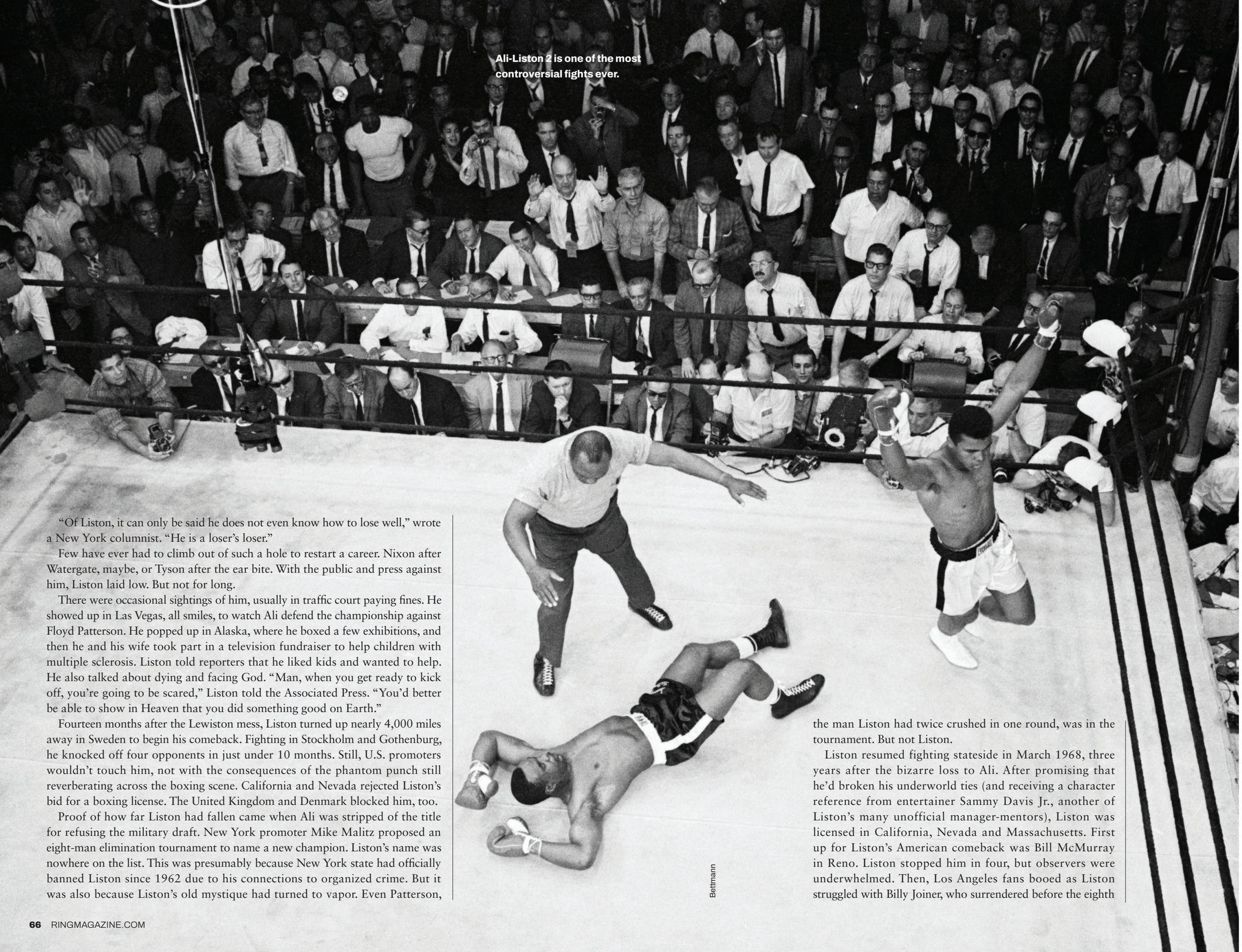
SONNY LISTON 2.0

LABELED A DISGRACE AFTER THE CONTROVERSY OF THE "PHANTOM PUNCH," THE FORMER HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION OF THE WORLD WAS FORCED TO EITHER RETIRE OR REBUILD

BY DON STRADLEY

After the debacle in Lewiston, Maine, where the most feared heavyweight in the world was knocked out in the first round by a punch that most didn't see, the nation seemed to rise at once and point an accusing finger at Sonny Liston. Whether they'd seen the fight or not, people across the land were dead certain that a fraud had taken place. The public cried that boxing should be 1) banned 2) investigated by the government or 3) overhauled by a federal committee so good ol' honest Americans never had to spend their hard-earned cash to see another bum go into the tank. Stand-up comedians made jokes about Liston, while creaky old boxing officials vowed to clean up the business once and for all. Liston mumbled vague excuses for what had happened, most to do with his not hearing the count, but he couldn't explain to anyone's satisfaction how a quick right hand from Muhammad Ali sent him sprawling. Regardless, the Liston problem had to be straightened out, otherwise Americans would never again get a good night's sleep.

Six decades later, the so-called "phantom punch" of May 25, 1965, occupies a large chapter in boxing lore. The blow connected, no doubt; it was the sort of snappy right landed by Ali throughout his career, usually when he was on the move and a rival was coming forward. "Slide to the right and drop it in," as his trainer, Angelo Dundee, would say. But whether it was hard enough to knock a man down, and why Liston spent so many seconds flopping around on the canvas, well, those were other issues. Ali's phantom knockout of Liston created such a scandal that it made the front page of major newspapers for three or four consecutive days, such was the importance at the time of a heavyweight title fight.



Ali-Liston 2 is one of the most controversial fights ever.

Bettmann

"Of Liston, it can only be said he does not even know how to lose well," wrote a New York columnist. "He is a loser's loser."

Few have ever had to climb out of such a hole to restart a career. Nixon after Watergate, maybe, or Tyson after the ear bite. With the public and press against him, Liston laid low. But not for long.

There were occasional sightings of him, usually in traffic court paying fines. He showed up in Las Vegas, all smiles, to watch Ali defend the championship against Floyd Patterson. He popped up in Alaska, where he boxed a few exhibitions, and then he and his wife took part in a television fundraiser to help children with multiple sclerosis. Liston told reporters that he liked kids and wanted to help. He also talked about dying and facing God. "Man, when you get ready to kick off, you're going to be scared," Liston told the Associated Press. "You'd better be able to show in Heaven that you did something good on Earth."

Fourteen months after the Lewiston mess, Liston turned up nearly 4,000 miles away in Sweden to begin his comeback. Fighting in Stockholm and Gothenburg, he knocked off four opponents in just under 10 months. Still, U.S. promoters wouldn't touch him, not with the consequences of the phantom punch still reverberating across the boxing scene. California and Nevada rejected Liston's bid for a boxing license. The United Kingdom and Denmark blocked him, too.

Proof of how far Liston had fallen came when Ali was stripped of the title for refusing the military draft. New York promoter Mike Malitz proposed an eight-man elimination tournament to name a new champion. Liston's name was nowhere on the list. This was presumably because New York state had officially banned Liston since 1962 due to his connections to organized crime. But it was also because Liston's old mystique had turned to vapor. Even Patterson, the man Liston had twice crushed in one round, was in the tournament. But not Liston.

Liston resumed fighting stateside in March 1968, three years after the bizarre loss to Ali. After promising that he'd broken his underworld ties (and receiving a character reference from entertainer Sammy Davis Jr., another of Liston's many unofficial manager-mentors), Liston was licensed in California, Nevada and Massachusetts. First up for Liston's American comeback was Bill McMurray in Reno. Liston stopped him in four, but observers were underwhelmed. Then, Los Angeles fans booed as Liston struggled with Billy Joiner, who surrendered before the eighth round. Henry Clark was next. Liston stopped him in seven at the Cow Palace in Daly City, a workmanlike win for an ABC-TV audience. Columnist Shirley Povich dismissed Clark as merely "an open target which Liston took too long to chop down."

The press noted changes in Liston. "The old venom is gone," wrote a journalist after Liston's boring stoppage of Roger Rischer in Pittsburgh. In the ring, he seemed slower, "strong but plodding." George Foreman, fresh from his gold medal win at the 1968 Summer Olympics, sparred with Liston at this time and said the former champion was as impressive as ever, not even blinking when Foreman landed a "monster shot." Yet there were reports that another sparring partner, Mac Foster, had knocked Liston loopy. Liston's trainer, Dick Saddler, denied this but admitted in Archie Moore's syndicated column that Foster "gave Sonny a bad time."

As the tournament went on without his name on the marquee, Liston forged ahead like a rusted old tank. He fought in Missouri, Texas, Arizona, any state that would host him. By the end of 1969, four and a half years since Lewiston, he'd won 14 consecutive fights, 13 by knockout. This sounded impressive, but Liston's comeback campaign consisted mostly of pushovers and journeymen, one of whom, Sonny Moore, had 30 losses on his record. Willis Earls, whom Liston defeated in Juarez, had lost four of his last five. Liston outweighed him by 34 pounds.

There was talk that Liston might fight Joe Frazier, who was recognized as heavyweight champion in five states, or Jimmy Ellis, who had emerged as the tournament winner and WBA titleholder. With a title shot in the offing, Liston was booked to fight on *ABC's Wide World of Sports*. The contest would take place at the Las Vegas Hilton on December 6, 1969. The opponent was Leotis Martin, a good but not great contender from Philadelphia. It was a disaster. Martin, a 3-1 underdog, knocked Liston stiff

at 1:28 of the ninth round. There was nothing phantomlike about this one. Liston lay face down on the canvas as if he'd been dropped there from the showroom rafters. He was still as a stone for a full minute. When Liston finally recovered, he responded with a beautiful, pithy comment. "If I knew what happened," Liston said, "maybe it wouldn't have happened."

The win did Martin no good. He suffered an eye injury in the bout and never fought again. Liston's future was also in question, but if boxing wasn't panning out, he'd found an unlikely side gig: showbiz.

In between fights, Liston was quietly compiling a list of acting credits. He played a boxer in *Harlow* (1965), while in *Head* (1968), a comic satire starring the TV rock group The Monkees, Liston appeared in a fantasy sequence where he punched out teen idol Davy Jones. In *Moonfire*, a low-budget 1970 feature, he was a truck driver taking on bikers, Mexican bandits and Nazis. These movies flopped, but Liston was no worse than any other professional boxer who tried acting. After a guest spot on ABC's *Love, American Style*, Liston said he was turning to acting because the opponents he wanted "are afraid to fight me."

Liston also appeared in a marketing campaign for Braniff Airlines. He'd already proven to be a willing photographer's subject, having once appeared on the cover of Esquire wearing a Santa Claus hat (a stunt that cost the magazine some advertisers), but in 1969, sometime between Davy Jones and Leotis Martin, Liston joined the reigning master of Pop Art, Andy Warhol, in a commercial to help sell Braniff. The scene had Liston in a well-tailored suit sitting next to Warhol, who yammers on about his artwork. The quirky ad was a success.

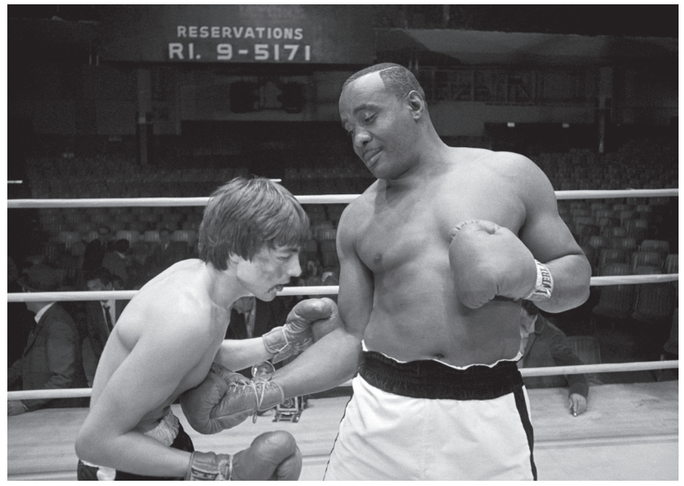
Liston's strangest appearance during these years came courtesy of The Beatles. While designing the cover for the famous *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album in 1967 – a sort of collage that featured the musicians surrounded by dozens of famous figures – British artist Peter Blake contacted Madame Tussauds wax museum to borrow a waxwork version of the band. Blake learned the museum had a wax likeness of Liston, which was about to be melted down since he was no longer the champion. The band members had not mentioned Liston on their list of people to feature on the cover. Blake, a boxing fan, decided to include him.

The wax Liston arrived at Blake's studio with its head detached, but it was quickly assembled and propped up for the photoshoot. Liston looks odd among such iconic characters as Karl Marx, James Dean and Albert Einstein, but the tableau remains one of the enduring images of the decade. After the photo session, Blake kept the Liston statue in his studio, sparing it from being melted. Meanwhile, the Grammy-winning album went on to be one of the top sellers of all time, with more than 32 million copies sold worldwide. That means a lot of people had an image of Liston somewhere in their music collection. A few generations of Beatles fans have stared at that cover trying to identify the 60-plus people in the lineup. They are probably stumped by the dour boxer on the far left. Thanks to The Beatles and Blake, the fighter shunned by society was in homes all over the planet.

However, being a pop culture totem wasn't as lucrative as one might think. Liston was nearly 40 and needed money. It was inevitable that he'd return to fighting.

Promoter Willie Gilzenberg wanted to bring Liston to New Jersey to face the large but limited Bayonne heavyweight Chuck Wepner. After convincing Liston that the state would grant him a license, Gilzenberg made the Liston-Wepner bout for Monday, June 29, 1970, at the National Guard Armory in Jersey City. Gilzenberg hoped the fight would launch a revival of big-time boxing in New Jersey, but the contest was a bore, like two lumbering animals battling at the mouth of a cave. With Wepner bleeding buckets, referee Barney Felix stopped the fight after the ninth and gave Liston the win by TKO. The number of stitches needed to sew Wepner's face shut became legendary (Wepner claimed it was 72, though a doctor at the time said it was no more than 20). Liston made about $13,000 for beating Wepner, but the Jersey City bloodbath would be his final victory. Six months later, he was dead.

Liston's wife, Geraldine, discovered his body in their Las Vegas home in January of 1971. He'd been dead for days. Investigators found heroin and marijuana in the house, though medical examiners said Liston died of natural causes: heart failure, lung congestion. Such an earthy explanation wasn't enough. When Liston died, it was supermarket tabloid time.



Liston playfully taps The Monkees' Davy Jones in 1968.

Bettmann

The former champ married his wife, Geraldine, in 1957.

Dove

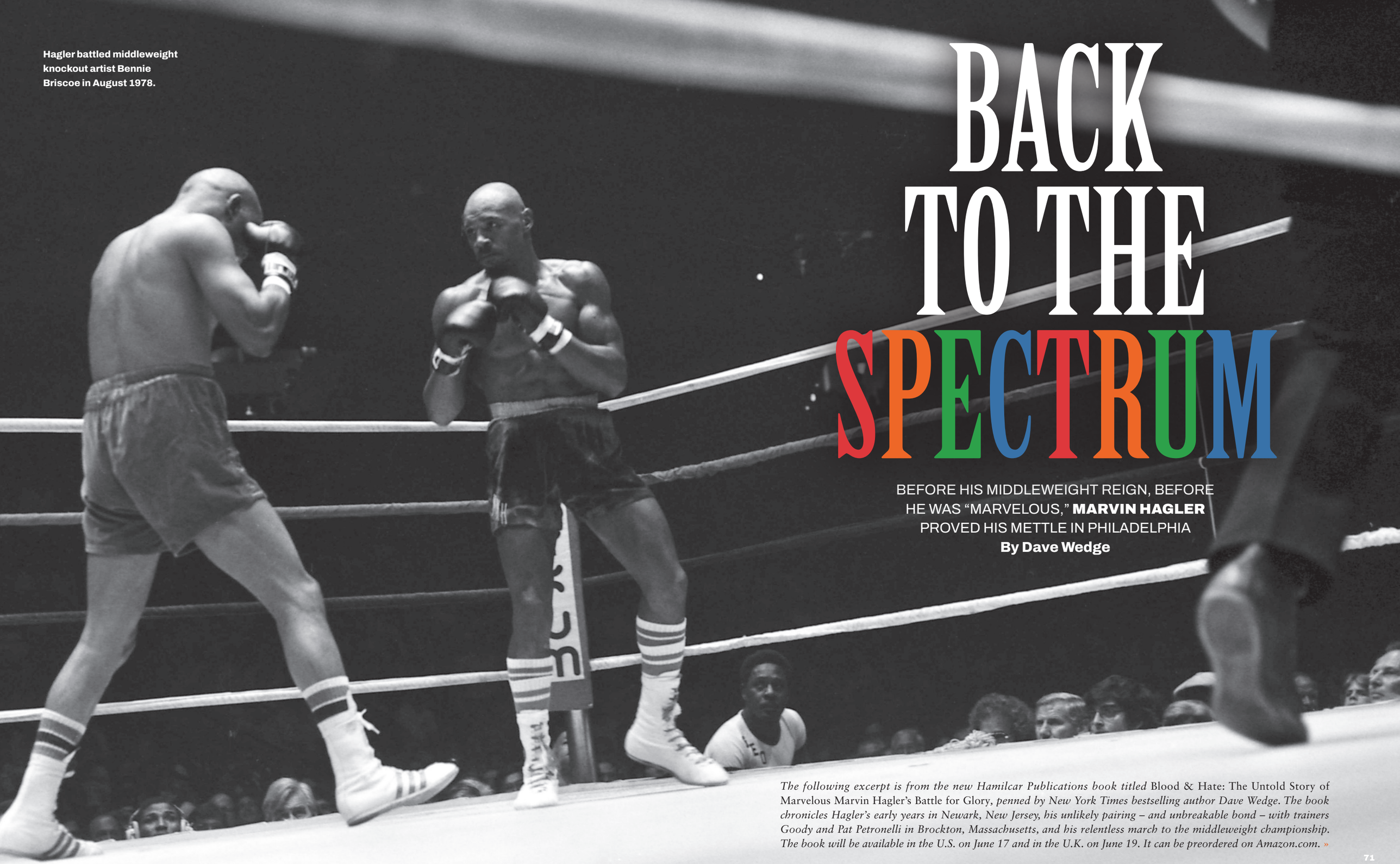
Heart stuff? The morbid among us demanded more, which led to stories about Liston trolling the dirtiest corners of Las Vegas, mingling with junkies and the Mafia. This, apparently, was the story people craved.

There was no homicide investigation, but an industry has grown around the belief that Liston was murdered, that he'd been hanging with an evil crowd and crossed the wrong guys. Some of the theories were ridiculous, as a variety of casino creeps, cocktail waitresses and gym rats came forward, each promising to reveal the truth at last. The parade of potential killers has included an all-powerful Las Vegas godfather, rogue cops and Black Muslims, all supposedly with reasons to want Liston dead. People didn't know what to believe, and one story was as good as another. When boxing endured some dull periods, we amused ourselves with nostalgic tales of bad old Sonny, the legend gone stale from repetition: Liston could knock down buildings with his jab, could freeze you with his stare, but ran afoul of genius criminals who could snuff a guy in his own bedroom without leaving any evidence. There have been countless documentaries and books about Liston, even a 1989 segment of NBC's *Unsolved Mysteries*, but he was inscrutable during his lifetime and is no easier to understand in death. Was he murdered? Was it an overdose? We'll never know, any more than we'll know Liston's real age or the exact number of stitches in Chuck Wepner's face.

Still, there's nothing like a mysterious death to raise one's stock. When Liston died, he went from being a short-term, embarrassing champion to an emblem of boxing's dark side – boxing's version of the Delta bluesman who makes a deal with Satan. Gravesite visits became a rite of passage for certain hardcore fans, as the former subject of scorn became a subject of pity. Liston's old quotes became heavy with portent and meaning, while the growing Liston cult helped flesh out his image. There was Liston, the champion no one wanted, with scars on his back from childhood whippings; Liston the ex-con who couldn't read or write; Liston the drunk; Liston the drug dealer; Liston the police informant.

His death was the final defilement of a carefully guarded private life, as we all scratched around for clues, trying to better understand Liston's shadowy existence. Even in death, the mysterious image was preserved, thanks partly to the ongoing rumors of a sinister cover-up. Stories emerged. True, not true, it didn't matter. We took these fragments and constructed a new Liston, the result being no more than another wax figure, upon which we could project whatever we wanted. To some, he was another example of a Black man destroyed by white society. To others, he was another victim of Las Vegas, the thorny tentacles of the place reaching across the bright lights to throttle him.

Armchair sleuths reckoned Liston was a scary character, and the bigger his legend grew, the greater the need for his killers to be unimaginably vicious. That's where the Mob fits in, for no matter how mean Liston was, La Cosa Nostra was meaner and hit harder. Yet gangland figures might not have been necessary to bring Liston down at that point. Liston's meanness was gone in those final years. Even as he rammed his jab into Wepner's face, he seemed bored. His intimidating quality had vanished as soon as he went belly-up in Lewiston. He didn't even try to pretend anymore. Was some of Liston's meanness only in our imaginations, suckers as we are for a media-made image? Geraldine once summed her husband up: "He don't say much, and he got that look – so he scare you. But he's lovable. I wouldn't live 14 years with no man that wasn't."



Hagler battled middleweight knockout artist Bennie Briscoe in August 1978.

BACK TO THE SPECTRUM

BEFORE HIS MIDDLEWEIGHT REIGN, BEFORE HE WAS "MARVELOUS," **MARVIN HAGLER** PROVED HIS METTLE IN PHILADELPHIA

By Dave Wedge

The following excerpt is from the new Hamilcar Publications book titled Blood & Hate: The Untold Story of Marvelous Marvin Hagler's Battle for Glory, *penned by New York Times bestselling author Dave Wedge. The book chronicles Hagler's early years in Newark, New Jersey, his unlikely pairing – and unbreakable bond – with trainers Goody and Pat Petronelli in Brockton, Massachusetts, and his relentless march to the middleweight championship. The book will be available in the U.S. on June 17 and in the U.K. on June 19. It can be preordered on Amazon.com.* »

In this chapter, Hagler returns to Philadelphia and The Spectrum arena, where, from 1976-1977, he battled a cadre of formidable contenders on his way up the middleweight ladder. In August 1978 – one year removed from his previous trip to the storied fight town – Hagler, now the top threat to middleweight champ Hugo Corro, was set to take on grizzled veteran "Bad" Bennie Briscoe:

The victories set up Marvin's return to The Spectrum. But this time, he was known and no longer needed Philadelphia to be a proving ground. He was the fighter to beat.

Bennie Briscoe was the last of the four Philadelphia fighters Marvin had to go through, after already facing Cyclone Hart, Willie Monroe, and Boogaloo Watts. Like all the others, Briscoe was a tough out. He was 60-15-5 coming into the fight.

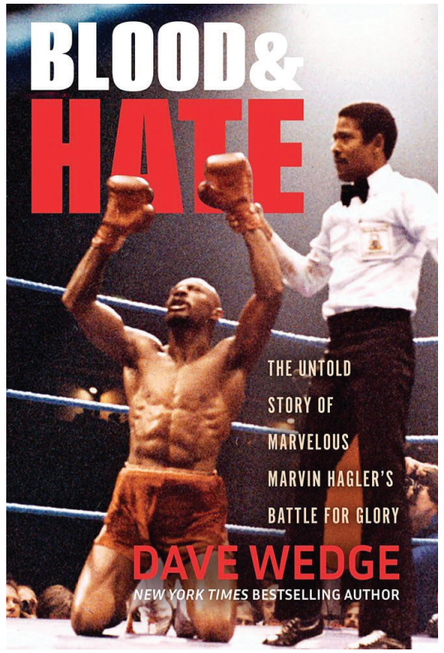
Also like several Philadelphia fighters, Briscoe was a transplant. Born in 1943 in Augusta, Georgia, he was one of fourteen kids and grew up poor. He was a standout football player and track athlete. He once caddied for President Dwight D. Eisenhower at Augusta National Golf Club.

He moved to North Philly when he was sixteen to attend Simon Gratz High School. It was there that he wandered into Joe Frazier's gym and began training alongside the future heavyweight champ. During the day, he was a city worker, first on the rat patrol and later as a garbage man. Throughout his life, wherever he was, he sent money from his weekly paycheck back to his mother in Georgia.

"If he had a million dollars, he wouldn't have a dime," Briscoe's brother Archie once said. "He would give it all away. He knew what it was like to be hungry."

Briscoe started fighting pro in 1962. In 1967, he fought Carlos Monzon before Monzon won the title. The fight was in Buenos Aires in Monzon's homeland of Argentina and Briscoe gave the favorite all he could handle. The fight was scored a draw but many thought Briscoe won.

A few years later, in 1972, when Monzon was the undisputed middleweight champion, he gave Briscoe a shot at the title, again in Argentina. It was another battle, as Monzon was seriously hurt by an overhand right in the ninth that spun him and left him dazed. Monzon clinched to clear his head and eventually battled back to win a fifteen-round decision.



In 1974, Briscoe fought for the vacant WBC middleweight title in Monaco, losing by seventh-round TKO to Rodrigo Valdes. He also fought former world champion Emile Griffith twice. In their first meeting in 1974, Briscoe lost a close decision at the Spectrum. In 1976, he fought Griffith to a draw in Monaco.

"When Bennie fights, he comes to fight; he don't come to play," Griffith said.

Russell Peltz promoted the August 24, 1978, Briscoe-Hagler fight in Philadelphia and recalls a meeting with Goody and Pat, during which they expressed frustration that they could not get Marvin a title shot. The brothers asked Peltz if he wanted to join their team and own a piece of Marvin. But Peltz – with Marvin's losses to Monroe and Watts fresh in his mind – declined. It's a decision that haunted him for decades.

"They cornered me outside my locker room," Peltz remembers. "They offered me a piece of the fighter at no cost."

"We'll cut you in," Pat told him.

But Peltz was focused on his Philadelphia stable and passed up the offer.

"That's how I turned down 10 percent of Marvelous Marvin Hagler," he says. "If I'd been smarter, I'd have signed him. But we didn't just think that way in those days."

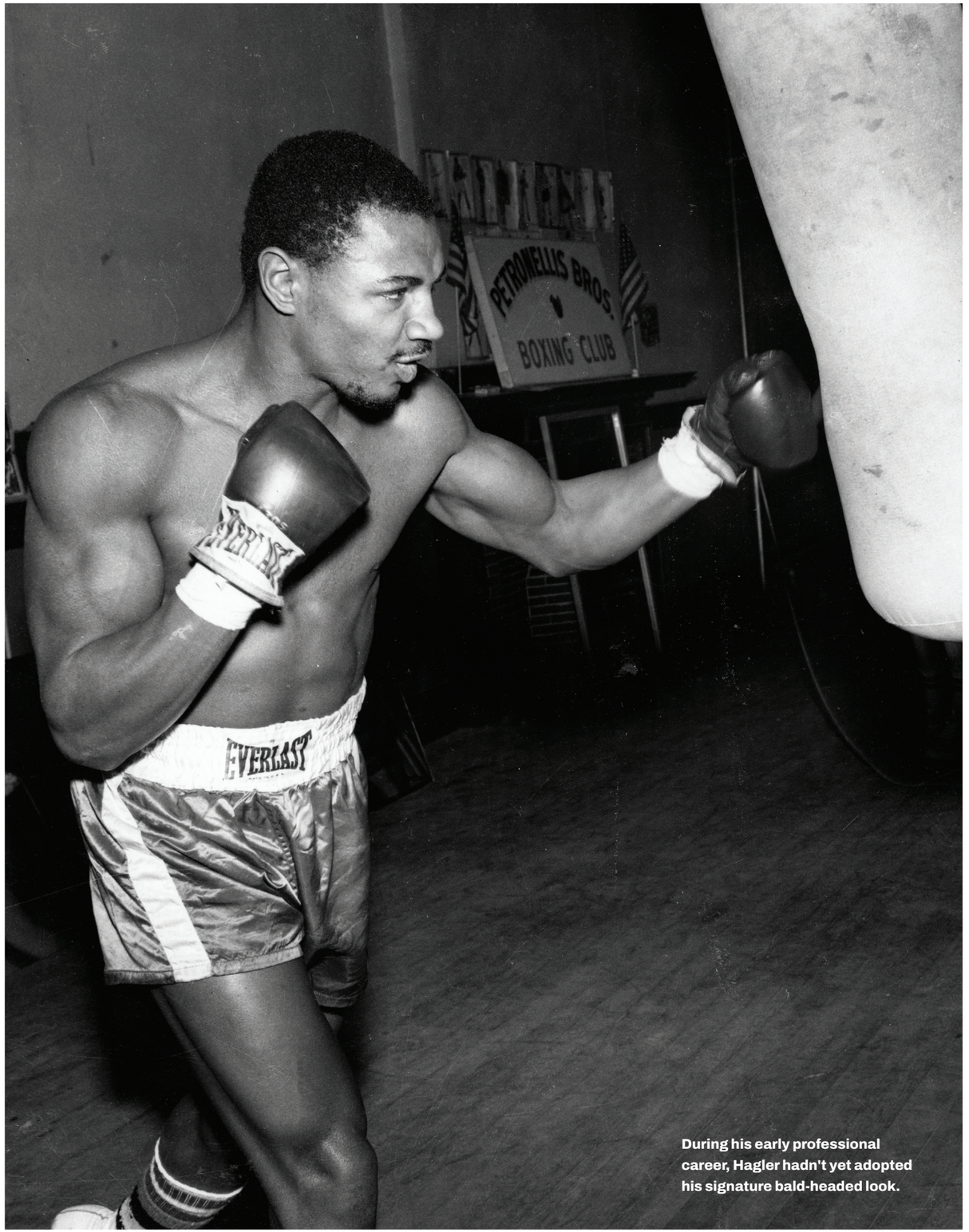
Peltz would often comp his fighters' meals. It turned out to be an expensive proposition when it came to Marvin, whose large entourage, mostly made up of family, ran up huge tabs.

"Hagler started bringing family with him and we started getting these rather high meal bills," Peltz remembers.

Attorney Steve Wainwright was part of his entourage. A flamboyant, bald-headed barrister, Wainwright was the son of former Brockton Mayor Richard Wainwright and was from a well-connected family of lawyers. He wore sparkly satin coats emblazoned with the word "BARRISTER" in rhinestones, sunglasses indoors and out, was friends with actress Bo Derek, and provided a lot of flash – and legal muscle – to Marvin's entourage.

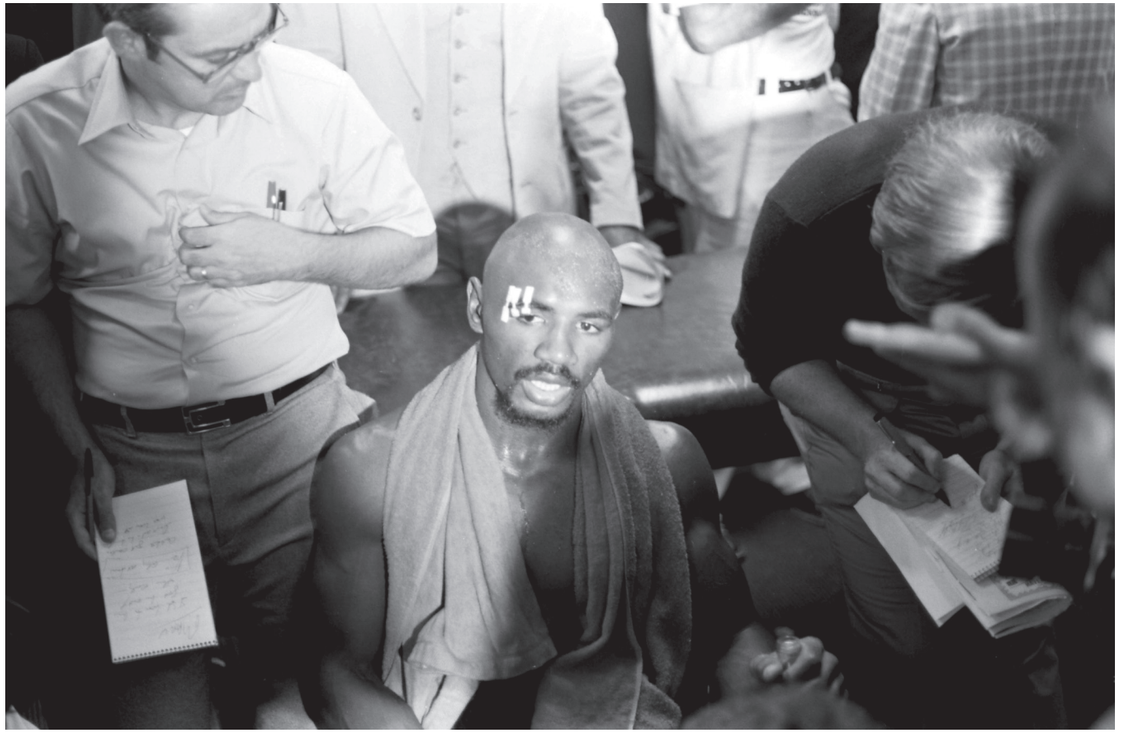
"He was worth the price of admission to take a meeting with him because he was such a unique character and a bit of a nut," said George Krieger, former vice president of HBO Sports. "They should have made a TV series about him."

It was Wainwright, a few years later, who filed the paperwork for Marvin to legally change his name to "Marvelous Marvin Hagler." Marvin made the name change in 1982 to thwart the media, ring announcers,



Boston Globe

During his early professional career, Hagler hadn't yet adopted his signature bald-headed look.



and anyone else who refused to use his "Marvelous" ring name. To him, it was maddening that announcers would refer to Joe Frazier as "Smokin' Joe," or Ray Leonard as "Sugar," but would not say "Marvelous." So changing his name legally precluded anyone from ever disrespecting him again.

The press called the Briscoe fight "The Battle of the Balds" because both fighters sported clean-shaven heads. The Spectrum was packed that night with more than fourteen thousand fans. To this day, it was the biggest non-title fight crowd in Philadelphia history.

There was also an interesting side story to the fight, as Peltz nearly booked an undercard exhibition match that would have pitted outspoken Philadelphia City Councilor Francis Rafferty – who boxed amateur in the U.S. Army – against Black activist Milton Street. The two nearly fought on the floor of the Philly City Council a few weeks before the fight over a proposal to end term limits for the city's mayor. During the dustup, Rafferty called Street a "faggot," which prompted Street to call the councilor a "racist." But the state boxing commission blocked the novelty bout, robbing Peltz of a few headlines.

It turned out that the main event was all anyone needed.

Marvin again locked down in Provincetown to train. He had six different sparring partners, including Tiger Moore, and swapped them in and out to simulate different styles that Briscoe might use. He and Goody ran their miles in the hot August sand out on Race Point on the tip of Cape Cod.

"All I do when I'm running is dream," Marvin said. "I dream of being the champion. … All I want is a shot. Give me a shot."

Goody continued to talk up his fighter to the press every chance he got. He knew Marvin was ready to beat anyone who came along.

"Marvin is the most feared fighter in the world today," Goody said.

Hagler was battle-tested long before he reached the championship.

In another interview, Marvin predicted he would send Briscoe, then thirty-five, into retirement.

"This is the fight I've been waiting for," Marvin said. "I want that man bad."

Briscoe, meanwhile, was confident. He had a tradition of calling his mother immediately after he won a fight. He predicted he would be dialing her number in Georgia shortly after the final bell at The Spectrum.

"I can't wait till it's all over," he said. "Then I can call my mother and tell her I won again."

Marvin countered: "This is Bennie's last hurrah and he knows it. I want to dispose of him in front of his people."

With Wainwright backing up Pat on the business side, Marvin was paid $17,500 for the bout, which was also broadcast live via closed-circuit TV at Boston Garden, thanks to Rip Valenti. The fight was the largest gate at The Spectrum at the time, proving that Marvin was not only a legitimate contender, but also a box-office draw. The power brokers in the sport were starting to take notice.

Tickets were just seven, ten, and fifteen dollars and fans got more than their money's worth. The two men were as advertised, showing why they were widely known as two of the division's hardest punchers.

In the second round, Marvin rocked Briscoe with a straight right, bloodying Briscoe's nose and knocking him sideways. In the third, Marvin was cut along his right eye from what appeared to be a headbutt. Blood poured down Marvin's face and there were concerns from his corner that the fight could be stopped if the cut was not closed.

Goody went to work.

"I'm not sure what coagulant he used, but I'm pretty sure it was illegal," said author and fight analyst Carlos Acevedo.

"I felt the coldness coming down my eye," Marvin said of the gash. "I got my confidence back by taking care of the fight and letting my trainer take care of my eye."

Briscoe had a great seventh round, but Marvin won the later rounds and took home a unanimous decision. The victory ran Marvin's record to 41-2-1 with 33 KOs and elevated him to the eighth-ranked middleweight in the world. It also inched him closer to a title shot, but there would be more work to do.

One person who was sure of Marvin's greatness was Briscoe's trainer, George Benton, whose nickname in the boxing world was "The Professor."

"This guy will beat the champ. This guy can beat anybody," Benton said.

The Philly press, too, left no doubt as to Marvin's performance. The rarely understated Philadelphia Daily News plastered the sports page with a headline that read: "HAGLER HUMILIATES AN OLD HERO." Boxing writer Thom Greer, meanwhile, called it a "boxing clinic" and said the decision was "a gross understatement."

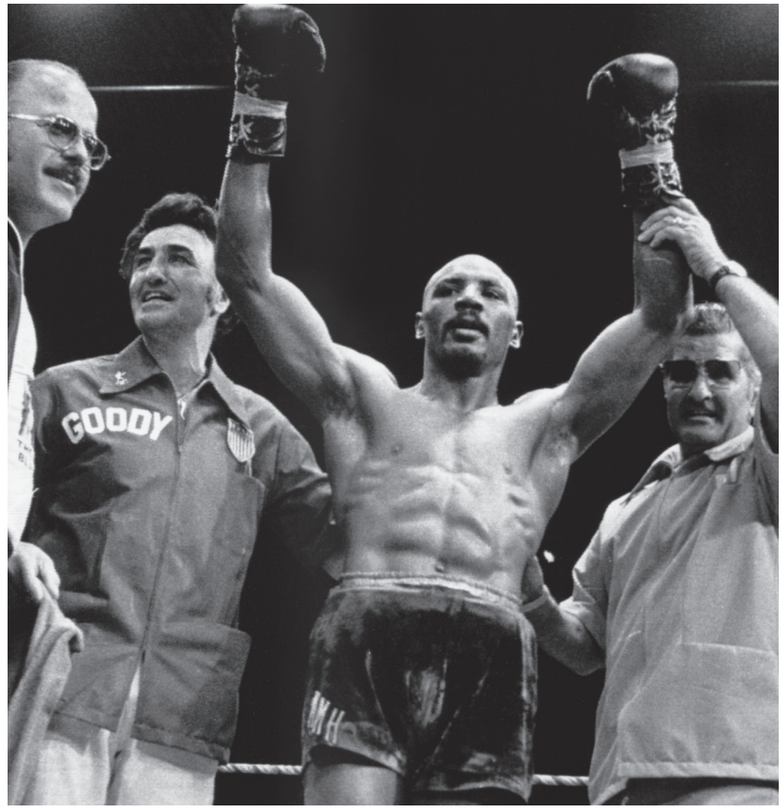
"Bennie Briscoe was totally outclassed," Greer wrote.

Briscoe went on to fight thirteen more times, losing seven. He remained a humble, dedicated city worker in the Philly sanitation department until he died in 2010 at sixty-seven.

In one of his last interviews, he said: "Other guys that started out when I started out, they're either in jail or on drugs, or they're dead, and I'm still here. I love my mother and my father, and that's why I think I lasted so long."

The victory was sweet for Marvin and ran his record at the dreaded Spectrum to 3-2, with victories over Briscoe, Willie Monroe and Cyclone Hart. His work with Goody and Pat, his tenacity, and his willingness to fight anyone and beat them convincingly left little doubt that he was the best middleweight in the world, or at least worthy of a shot at proving it.

There were still many obstacles ahead, including a shot at revenge for the Boogaloo Watts decision. But most of all, he wanted respect and a chance to fight for the belts that so many thought he deserved.



Bettmann

Hagler and the Petronelli brothers enjoyed incredible success together.

Dave Wedge, a Brockton native, was an award-winning investigative journalist for the Boston Herald for 14 years. He is a writer for Boston magazine. Find him on Instagram @davidmwedge

FUNDAMENTALS

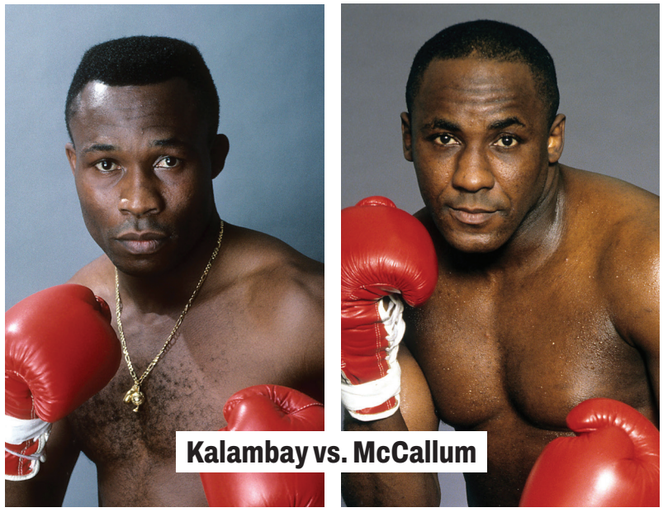
Essential tools for the boxing deep dive

By Tom Gray

FORGOTTEN CLASSIC:

Sumbu Kalambay UD 12 Mike McCallum

» March 5, 1988, Palazzo Dello Sport, Pesaro, Italy



Kalambay vs. McCallum

Any longtime boxing enthusiast hears the name Mike McCallum and fondly recalls the Jamaican-born boxer-puncher as one of the finest fighters of the late '80s and early '90s. "The Body Snatcher" was a world titleholder in three weight classes, junior middleweight to light heavyweight, and could do it all in the ring. He prevailed in classic battles with the likes of Milton McCrory, Donald Curry, Julian Jackson and Steve Collins during his Hall of Fame career.

However, McCallum's first professional defeat came against a demure boxing savant who hailed from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and made his home in Marche, Italy. Sumbu Kalambay was far from a household name, but the former middleweight titleholder was as classy a stylist as you could ever wish to see.

The 32-0 McCallum was moving up in weight after posting six defenses of the WBA junior middleweight crown. His fifth-round, one-punch knockout over Curry sent shockwaves through the sport and led to him being installed as the favorite to unseat Kalambay, who had recently claimed the vacant WBA middleweight crown at the expense of Iran Barkley.

The oddsmakers were wrong.

Kalambay took control early, doubling and tripling an eyeblink-quick left jab into the face of the challenger. By controlling distance so perfectly with his feet, he forced McCallum to overreach and then took advantage with a varied array of sharp counterpunches.

McCallum wasn't dominated and performed well, but he was a step behind against a cerebral and finely tuned champion who boxed the fight of his life. Kalambay solidified his victory in the championship rounds as his passionate home support yelled his nickname, "Patrizio," down the stretch. The decision was unanimous for Kalambay (118-114, 116-115, 115-114), and he'd earned it.

Given the quality of the opponent and the performance level that Kalambay maintained throughout, this win could very well make the short list for best boxing displays of the decade. Without exaggeration, the defending champ was brilliant.

Following this epic triumph, Kalambay would score impressive wins over Robbie Sims and Doug DeWitt before his infamous first-round destruction at the hands of another future Hall of Famer, Michael Nunn. But before he was finished, Kalambay would double up on a points victory over the excellent Herol Graham and outpoint Steve Collins.

McCallum would avenge the loss via 12-round split decision in April 1991.

The first Kalambay vs. McCallum fight was broadcast live in the U.S. by ABC in the afternoon, so it would have had a significant audience. However, the fight, much like Kalambay, who should frankly be included on the Hall of Fame ballot, seems to have been unfairly forgotten.

If this fight has passed you by, then do your best to locate it on YouTube or source it from a collector. You can't go wrong!

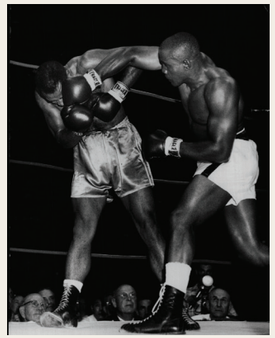
LOST FIGHT:

Sonny Liston KO 3 Zora Folley

» July 18, 1960, The Denver Coliseum, Denver, Colorado

In the early 1960s, Liston was the No. 1-rated heavyweight contender, according to The Ring, and legitimately feared. Folley, The Ring's No. 2 contender, was arguably the best pure boxer in the sport's glamour division and, like Liston, he wanted his first shot at becoming champion.

However, despite the bout's significance, there is not a shred of footage available from Liston vs. Folley as it approaches its 65th anniversary. The story goes that Archie Moore was set to take on former German Olympian Erich Schöppner on a closed-circuit doubleheader, but when Moore withdrew, so did the financial support for the domestic telecast.



If you weren't in the arena, you didn't see this fight.

What we do know from reports is that Liston had a look at Folley in Round 1 before smashing him to the canvas early in the second. Refusing to go out without a fight, Folley immediately went on the attack and backed up his fearsome foe with a sustained assault. Unfortunately, the Arizona-based contender's success was short-lived, as he was decked again before the bell and finished off early in Round 3.

Despite the lack of TV rights, the bout set a gate record in Denver with 9,252 paid fans bringing in $77,406.55.

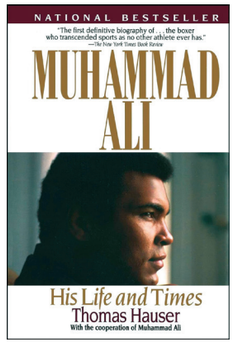
Four weeks earlier, Floyd Patterson had become the first man in boxing history to regain the heavyweight championship of the world. The unassuming peek-a-boo knockout artist had separated Swedish puncher Ingemar Johansson from his senses with a powder-keg left hook from hell at the Polo Grounds.

Liston would score three more bone-crushing victories before finally securing a title shot against Patterson in September 1962.

MUST-READ:

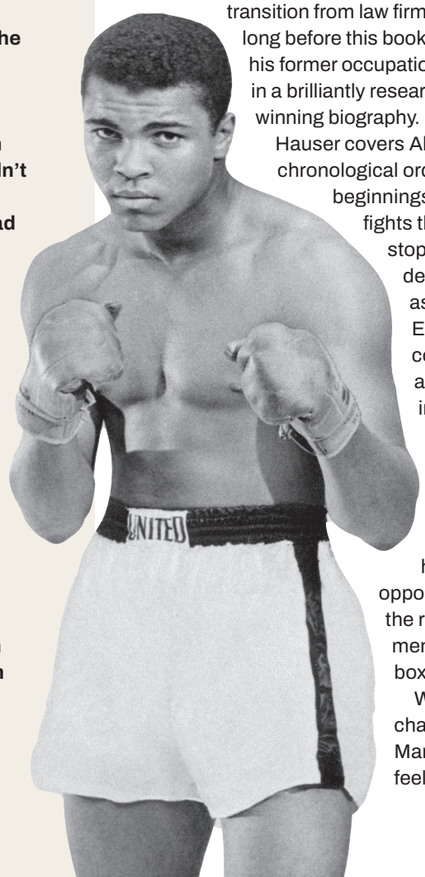
Muhammad Ali: His Life & Times

» By Thomas Hauser (Simon & Schuster, 1991)



The life and career of Muhammad Ali have been recounted innumerable times over the decades. We've had books, magazines, documentaries, repeated long-form interviews and two feature-length biopics exploring every facet of the most celebrated career in boxing history.

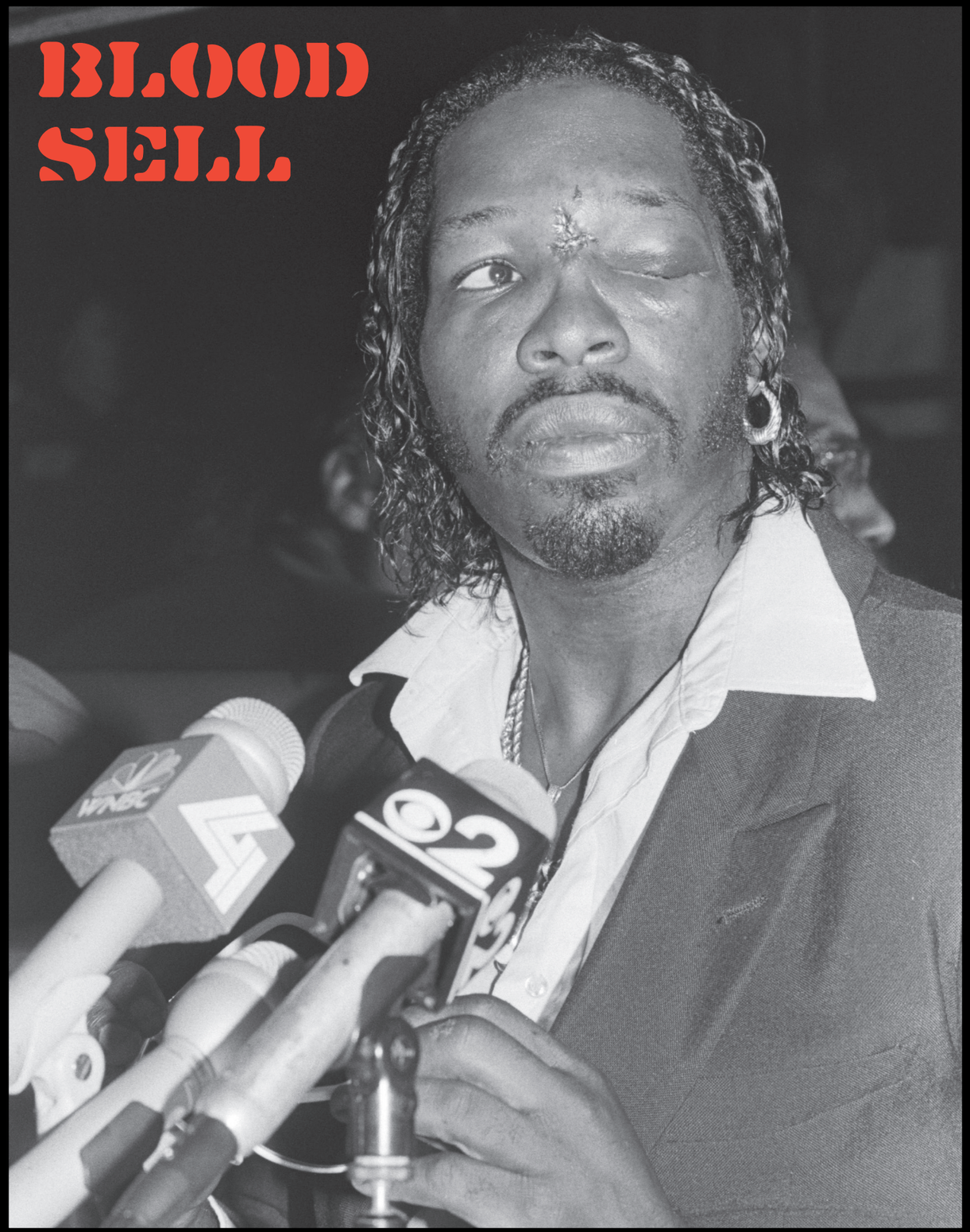
Muhammad Ali: His Life & Times is the definitive account of "The Greatest." Its author (and Ring Magazine contributor) Thomas Hauser made the transition from law firm associate to writer long before this book was published, but his former occupation shines through in a brilliantly researched and award-winning biography.



Hauser covers Ali's life in chronological order, from his humble beginnings in Louisville to the fights that made the world stop, as well as his rapid decline and rebirth as a humanitarian. Each chapter contains first-person accounts from the individuals who were around the great former champion at specific times in his life. Contributing is Ali himself, almost every opponent he ever shared the ring with, family members and countless boxing insiders.

When you reach the chapter on The Thrilla in Manila, you can almost feel the heat. RING

BLOOD SELL



Bettmann

Mitch Green speaks to the media shortly after his notorious scrap with Mike Tyson.

WITH A BOXING BUSINESS THAT IS INCREASINGLY SEARCHING FOR PROVOCATIVE CHARACTERS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA-FRIENDLY BEEFS, **MITCH "BLOOD" GREEN** IS READY FOR HIS CLOSEUP (AGAIN)

By Thomas Gerbasi

Nearly two decades after his last professional fight, and even longer since he was a relevant heavyweight contender, people are still fascinated with Mitch "Blood" Green.

Why?

"I think there are legitimate reasons to be fascinated with Mitch Green," said Charles Farrell, author of *The Legend of Mitch "Blood" Green and Other Boxing Essays*.

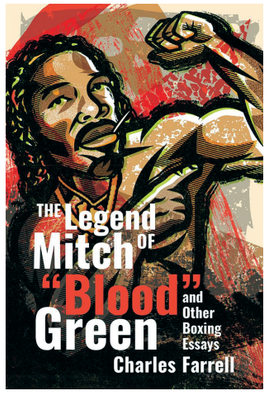
"Mitch Green was prescient, at least in terms of things like hip-hop culture. And so I think that what we're seeing in that particular culture now is stuff that Mitch Green thought about 40 years ago. The way he presented himself, the way he looked, the kind of boastful stuff he did. Whatever you want to say about him as a fighter, his street credibility is real, and that's a very important thing in a number of parts of our culture these days. He's also a very striking-looking guy, and that has something to do with it. And he kept himself sort of in the public eye for a long time. He's only really dropped out, I'd say, in the past, maybe a decade or so, and I'm trying to bring him back as best I can, at least for the short term."

By now, you'll realize that the book (published by Hamilcar Publications) is not a straight biography, and Farrell is not your typical author. A longtime manager and fight game insider, Farrell's writing on boxing and his life in it were first collected in 2021's *(Low)life: A Memoir of Jazz, Fight-Fixing, and the Mob*, and while the other essays here, which range from analysis of Floyd Mayweather's fight with Conor McGregor to an examination of boxing's "Black Code," are must-reads in their own right, it's the tale of Farrell's relationship with Green as manager long after the New Yorker's 1986 bout with Mike Tyson and his infamous street fight with "Iron Mike" in 1988 that's the star of the show.

In other words, every bizarre story you've heard about the boxing business gets elevated to new heights (or lows) with Green involved. You almost feel sorry for Farrell as he consistently puts his charge in position to make a comeback and get a big fight, only to see those plans fall apart. Green, oddly enough, for all his faults and self-sabotage, comes off as the person you wouldn't mind sharing a beer with, which makes him a sympathetic figure for his inability to get that big opportunity.

Farrell apparently feels the same way, as he tells The Ring that he's working with the 68-year-old again, though not for a comeback. Well, not that kind of comeback.

"I'm going to play out the string," he chuckles. "I'm going to see what happens with it. We've got this book event, and we've already been in Hollywood together a couple of months ago to see what might happen there. So I'm testing the water. And Mitch Green is being Mitch Green."



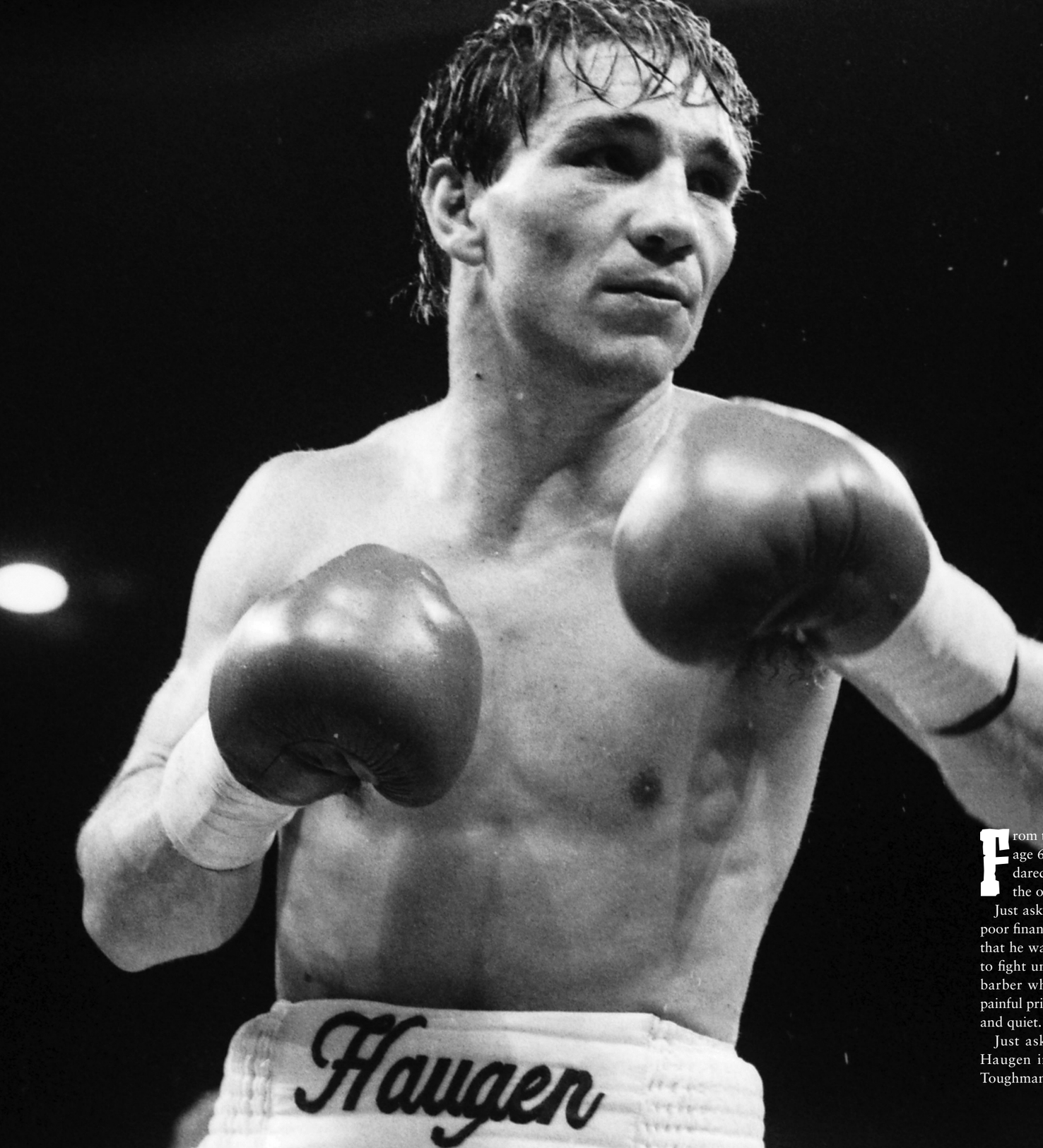
Does that mean he still wants that "official" rematch with Tyson, who, at 58, is coming off a November 2024 loss to Jake Paul?

"He's still looking for Tyson, in a way," said Farrell. "The funny thing is, I'm thinking Tyson is probably more amenable to doing something with him now than he has ever been. It wouldn't be fighting, but, at this stage, even if they're burying the hatchet publicly, it would probably do everybody a lot of good and it certainly would sell a lot of books."

It would, but Farrell shouldn't need a Tyson vs. Green publicity stunt to sell copies of this one. Like his previous book, he removes the romance of the boxing business and gives it to readers straight, whether we want it or not. That may be a turn-off to some, but to those who want the warts-and-all stories of what happens far from the bright lights, you've got it. As for Green, the former gang member and amateur standout who had the size and talent to become a world champion, he is the cautionary tale of cautionary tales. It's an entertaining tale, to say the least, but a sad one as well, because he could have been in a much different place today than he is.

"Other than Mike Tyson and Trevor Berbick, Mitch Green faced no really threatening opponents during his career," writes Farrell. "As a member of Don King's stable of dazzlingly talented indentured prizefighters, however, he did spar extensively with the cream of the 1980s heavyweight crop.

"The world may not have gotten to see it as often as it should have, but Mitch 'Blood' Green could fight his ass off when he felt like it. Far less accomplished fighters have won versions of the heavyweight title. It took a mystifying concatenation of fuckups by everyone involved – especially Mitch himself – to have somehow kept a championship from his grasp." RING



BEYOND TOUGH

GREG HAUGEN BECAME A FAN FAVORITE THROUGH HIS ABSOLUTELY FEARLESS APPROACH TO FIGHTING – WHICH WAS EASY BECAUSE IT WAS THE THING HE LOVED MOST

By Lee Groves

From the day he was born in 1960 until the day he died at age 64, Greg Haugen fought valiantly against those who dared to underestimate him. More often than not, he was the one who emerged victorious.

Just ask the bullies who teased him because of his family's poor financial state, his Native American heritage and the fact that he was smaller than most boys his age. Once he learned to fight under the tutelage of Jim Montgomery – the family barber who ran a local boxing club – those bullies paid a painful price and, with that, Haugen won the privilege of peace and quiet.

Just ask the bigger and stronger opponents who faced Haugen in Alaska bars as part of the single-elimination Toughman circuit, which gave local fighters with little or no formal boxing training a place to slug it out. Past profiles mistakenly identified these rowdy, fast-paced matches as the genesis of Haugen's fistic life, but, according to the biography *Tough Man: The Greg Haugen Story* by Anthony "Zute" George, Haugen was able to defeat all comers because he possessed a valuable asset they lacked – experience.

"Everyone thought I learned how to fight in the [Toughman] fights in Alaska," Haugen says in the book. "Most people don't realize I had over 300 amateur fights. Most of the guys I fought were tough, rugged guys. They didn't have any boxing experience. I would use my experience to outsmart them for the first round. By the time the second round came around, they were dead tired, huffing and puffing. So, all they could do was quit or let me beat them up. It was a game plan that

The gutsy Haugen captured world titles in two weight classes.

worked 24 out of 24 times."

The Auburn, Washington, native became a sensation in Alaska, so much so that he eventually commanded $1,000 per fight, and, for one victorious bout against a 225-pounder billed as "The Yukon Crusher," Haugen – who spent most of his career fighting between 135-147 pounds – pocketed $2,500.

When Haugen turned pro in 1982, he was immediately slotted into a 10-rounder against a 13-3-1 pro named Noel Arriesgado, demanding circumstances for any pro debutant. Not only did Haugen win, he scored a seventh-round TKO. Moreover, each of his first five fights – all of which he won – were 10-rounders, after which he retreated to the four-rounders and six-rounders customary for beginning pros.

His rise toward contender status began with a 10-round decision victory against the 19-1 Jeff Bumpus (a late replacement for hot prospect John Wesley Meekins) – his first fight on a Top Rank-promoted show – but it was his consecutive upset wins over Freddie Roach, Chris Calvin and Charlie "White Lightning" Brown that cemented Haugen as a fighter to watch. All three bouts were staged inside the Showboat Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, and each was featured on ESPN's "Top Rank Boxing" series.

Haugen continued his roll with wins against Juan Carlos Alvarado Vazquez, Ken Willis, Edwin Curet and Ernie Landeros, victories that earned him a crack at Jimmy Paul's IBF lightweight title in December 1986.

By this time, Haugen's Toughman legend was in full flower, and he fortified it with his straight-talking, no-nonsense demeanor. Although his father nicknamed him "Mutt" for the "Mutt and Jeff" comic strip character, the moniker morphed into one that crystalized his rough-around-the-edges Everyman persona. By fighting Paul, Haugen was confronted by two daunting challenges: the 15-round distance (which the IBF retained until 1988) and the fact that Paul was Haugen's best opponent to date.

Once again, Haugen, a 4-to-1 underdog, was underestimated. And once again, he defied the experts. Haugen's majority decision victory produced two surprises: First, Haugen won not by out-brawling Paul but by out-boxing him; his subtle in-and-out movement and command of distance enabled him to out-jab the taller and rangier titlist. Second, Haugen connected sharply against an above-average defender while also showcasing his own defensive prowess. A CompuBox retro-count revealed Haugen landed 42% of his total punches and 55% of his power shots while tasting just 21% and 34% respectively. Because Haugen fought the fight of his life exactly when he needed to, he was a world titleholder.

Most freshly minted beltholders would want their first defense to be in their hometown against a "soft" opponent. Not Haugen. He accepted a proposal to fight a dangerous challenger in Vinny Pazienza in Pazienza's native Rhode Island.

The bombastic Pazienza and the pugnacious Haugen produced pre-fight verbal fireworks that drew a full house inside the Providence Civic Center, then known as "The Devil's Den" thanks to Pazienza's "Pazmanian Devil" nickname. A memorable nose-to-nose staredown during the final instructions portended the resulting firefight. Beset by pre-fight dehydration and illness, Pazienza suffered cuts, a broken nose and a nearly swollen-shut eye thanks to Haugen's pinpoint blows, but a late-round surge by Pazienza resulted in a close unanimous decision for the home state hero. Most felt Haugen deserved to win, but Pazienza's courage and home ring advantage proved too much to overcome.

The bout's quality demanded a sequel, and once again its location (Atlantic City) didn't favor Haugen. Although Pazienza made 135, he reportedly had to shed eight pounds in the final four days while Haugen was in pristine condition thanks to bringing back trainer George Chemeres and hiring conditioning coach Keith Kleven, who had worked with Larry Holmes. Observers expected another tit-for-tat war, but Haugen again defied expectations by delivering a supreme performance. He again turned Pazienza's face into a crimson mask, and though Pazienza fought with typical bravery, Haugen's skill decisively won the battle as well as the war, and he regained the title.

Haugen finally got his homecoming fight against Miguel Santana in April 1988, but the fight inside the Tacoma Dome turned into a bizarre saga. An accidental butt opened a gash over Haugen's right eyebrow that caused the fight to be stopped after Round 11, with referee Jim Cassidy declaring Santana the TKO winner. Thirty minutes later, Haugen "retained" the title because he was ahead on two scorecards at the time of the stoppage. Bizarrely, some 18 years later, an investigation spurred by Santana led to him receiving an IBF belt and recognition as a former titleholder.

Haugen recorded one more defense – a 10th round TKO over Gert Bo Jacobsen in Jacobsen's native Denmark – before losing the belt to Pernell Whitaker via lopsided unanimous decision. Haugen went 4-1 in his next five (the only loss being on points to Pazienza) to set up a showdown with WBO 140-pound titleholder Hector Camacho. A 7-to-1 underdog against the 38-0 "Macho Man," Haugen overcame a third-round knockdown to win his second divisional title by split decision, a verdict he earned with psychological trickery. Haugen refused to touch gloves at the start of the 12th and, after he said something to Camacho, Camacho threw a flurry in response. That prompted referee Carlos Padilla to penalize Camacho one point – a point that turned Art Lurie's 114-114 score into a 114-113 tally for Haugen and turned a title-retaining draw for Camacho into a title-winning split decision for Haugen.

A prime Chavez was too much for most fighters, Haugen included.

"I goaded him into losing a point," Haugen proclaimed.

The controversial ending resulted in an immediate rematch less than three months later. Once again, the decision was split, but this time Camacho was the victor.

Thanks in part to a TKO win over Ray Mancini in April 1992, Haugen fought for a widely recognized title one last time in February 1993 against WBC 140-pound champion Julio Cesar Chavez in Mexico City before the largest paid crowd in boxing history. Haugen famously panned Chavez's 84-0 record by declaring he had beaten "Tijuana taxi drivers." That, along with promoter Don King falsely ascribing anti-Mexican comments to Haugen, whipped the 132,000-plus fans into a frenzy.

"The walk to the ring was about 200 yards – 200 of the worst yards I have ever seen," Haugen told me for a KO magazine article. "You couldn't get through. People were packed like tuna in a can. We had bodyguards trying to protect us from the crowd, but there weren't anywhere near enough of them to prevent the crowd from getting to us if they really wanted to. I probably had some beer and cups of piss thrown on me; they were holding on to our flags and spitting on them. It was cruel. Can you imagine what it would've been like if I would've knocked Chavez out? It was a very scary feeling being in a spot like that. It was like a mouse caught by a cat: You either run or you die."

Haugen was floored seconds into the fight and stopped in the fifth, but despite the pain and disappointment he must have felt, he kept his sense of humor. During the post-fight interview, he told Chavez that his opponents "must have been tough taxi drivers."

Haugen ended his 17-year career in December 1999 with a record of 39-10-1 (19 KOs), and to the end he showed his trademark grit. He battled kidney cancer for three wrenching years before finally succumbing on February 22.

He wasn't the biggest, strongest or fastest, but he was good enough – and tough enough – to overcome every obstacle. Because of that, he produced a career that was well-fought – and a life that was well-lived. RING

John Iacono

Holly Stein

FIGHT DOCTOR

The Risks of Dietary Supplements – Are Fighters Flying Blind?

By Dr. Margaret Goodman

A fighter subject to any anti-doping program is ultimately responsible for anything found in his or her system. The various dietary supplements commonly used for health benefits are a tricky part of the equation. Yes, supplements are the go-to excuse for many caught in the crosshairs of an adverse drug test – the same way a driver who runs a stop sign says it was blocked by a tree – but unfortunately, too few really understand the risks in using supplements and are often playing Russian roulette with their health, career and reputation.

As head of an anti-doping testing program since 2011, I've seen how supplements are a minefield for every boxer. Fighters sometimes list more than 20 supplements on their Voluntary Anti-Doping Association (VADA) enrollment forms, but rarely have they had any of their supplements tested.

According to Oliver Catlin, president and co-founder of Banned Substance Control Group (BSCG), "Banned substances are everywhere. They appear in dietary supplements, contaminated meat, drugs in our water, through plants absorbing drugs through irrigation, certain plants synthesizing anabolic steroids, contaminated medications and compounding pharmacies. Banned substances can also be transmitted through kissing someone after they've used a drug, sexual contact with a drug user or sharing sports equipment like a knee brace or neoprene sleeve."

Supplements marketed for weight loss often contain hidden pharmaceutical drugs. A 2022 paper published by the Journal of the American Medical Association reported that beginning in 2015, the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) sent 31 warning letters to weight-loss product manufacturers. Only one product was recalled, and nine could still be bought online years after the FDA issued the warning.

Another study published by the California Department of Public Health in 2018 looked at supplements from 2007-2016 and found unapproved pharmaceutical ingredients in 776 products marketed for sexual enhancement, weight loss or muscle building. Some contained sibutramine, a dangerous stimulant that was removed from the U.S. market and many countries in 2010 due to the risk of heart disease. Several prohibited diuretics were also found, and some products even contained antidepressants. Antidepressants themselves are a valuable treatment, and many fighters take them. Although antidepressants are not banned, they could still have serious side effects in the wrong athlete, including gastrointestinal upset, sleep disorders, heart disease, weight gain, low sex drive, erectile dysfunction and mental health issues. The right dose and correct drug requires strict physician supervision. So, adding an extra antidepressant as a contaminant can seriously interfere with someone's current prescription medication.

BOTTOM LINE: Fighters need to investigate everything they take. They could be consuming something that not only might cause a positive drug test, implode their reputation or cause a lengthy suspension, but could also endanger their health.

For example, there has been significant discussion recently about SARMs (selective androgen receptor modulators), which can trigger an increase in muscle mass. A prime example is ostarine – also known as enobosarm. Many athletes have been caught with SARMs in their supplements. Some may purposely take supplements containing SARMs believing they're the magic bullet for improving muscle growth without lifting weights.

Although one can easily purchase them on the internet, SARMs remain under investigation by the FDA, so their safety profile and long-term side effects are unknown. It is illegal for companies to market them as "dietary supplements," but manufacturers get around this by using the following language on the label: "For research purposes only" or "Not for human consumption." This lack of regulation means the SARM amount could be very low or very high. As of 2023, the FDA has warned that SARMs could increase the risk of a heart attack, stroke, psychosis, hallucinations, liver disease/failure, testicular shrinkage, infertility or miscarriage.

"Research chemicals are also becoming a huge issue for athletes," notes Catlin. "Many are investigational drugs or experimental substances sold online as research chemicals to get around dietary supplement laws and regulations. In fact, they often contain dangerous or banned substances."

How can you determine what's in your supplements? Reading the label is a nightmare, as substances frequently have multiple names. That is certainly true of stimulants. So if you are looking for a specific prohibited substance, you might think you're in the clear when actually you're not. Plus, who has the time to go through everything on a label?

Catlin describes a four-step plan that every boxer should follow before taking any dietary supplements: "One, look for a third-party seal on the product label. Two, even if the seal is there, look for the lot number on the product label – usually on the bottom. Three, pull up the product online and search their database for the lot number of your bottle to ensure your lot was certified. And four, purchase two bottles with the same lot number and keep one sealed." In this way, should the boxer test positive, they would have a guarantee to prove that either the supplement was contaminated or that the label contained an unlisted prohibited substance.

There has been the rare success story of an athlete litigating against a supplement company for a prohibited substance not listed on the label, but sadly, the positive outcomes happen long after the athlete has been labeled a drug user. Former UFC, Bellator and now Global Fight League fighter Yoel Romero faced a possible two-year suspension in 2016 for ibutamoren, a prohibited substance that stimulates growth hormone secretion. When it was found that a supplement he'd taken – "Shred Rx" from Gold Star Performance Products – contained ibutamoren but didn't mention it on the label, Romero was awarded $27.45 million (reduced to $12.45 million) and was given a reduced six-month suspension. That still took time and attorney fees. Possible reputational damages are being decided at another trial. It's also unclear if he has received any funds.

Some blame the increased sensitivity of anti-doping testing. Many commissions in the U.S. and internationally use World Anti-Doping Association (WADA) accredited laboratories. They test for everything on the banned list. Since the 1980s, WADA laboratories' ability to pick up prohibited substances has improved or increased over 1,000-fold. This amplifies the risk that a fighter using contaminated or "spiked" dietary supplements will "pop" positive and be labled as a "doper" by a social media universe with little conscience.

There are positive changes. Clenbuterol, a substance banned in the U.S. since 1991 and the European Union since 1996, is still used by many countries to result in leaner meat or a higher muscle-to-fat ratio in livestock. In humans, it has been abused due to its anabolic (muscle building) properties and can produce an increased heart rate, muscular tremors, headaches and nausea. In May 2019, WADA finally conceded that testing needed to distinguish between deliberate versus accidental consumption that was not performance-enhancing, if less than 5 nanograms/ml was found in a urine test.

Also in 2019, the California State Athletic Commission, under the direction of Andy Foster, went even further and modified their disciplinary guidelines for a handful of banned substances that they believed could appear from contamination, or adjusted the levels considered to be performance-enhancing. Hopefully other commissions will follow suit.

VADA works with a service called Axis (axis.drugfreesport.com), which is free to all fighters, their representatives and trainers. It has considerable up-to-date lists of supplements that have ever contained banned substances and is a resource for diet and exercise as well. After establishing an account, the fighter or his or her team can email copies of labels and names to determine if a supplement company or product has ever been found to contain prohibited substances, whether listed on the label or not. Axis won't ultimately confirm a supplement is safe, but they will advise the level of risk.

An even better way for fighters to see if their supplements are free of banned substances is to see if they're certified. There are several companies in the U.S. and abroad – including BSCG, Eurofins, Intertek, Informed Sport and NSF – that conduct product certification. Certification starts with an in-depth audit of the label along with the company's claims and quality control. Every batch is tested for over 500 drugs that include substances banned in sports, over 200 prescription medications and over-the-counter or illicit drugs, with annual verification of label claims and contaminant testing.

If the supplement isn't listed as certified on a database, fighters or their representatives can mail sealed supplements to one of the testing companies to undergo testing. Yes, it's costly, but when you compare the repercussions in testing positive, it's a sound investment for many. RING

Dr. Margaret Goodman is a former Nevada State Athletic Commission chief physician, co-hosts the Fighter Health and Safety Podcast and is president of the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association.

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Law and Order

Nisa Rodriguez and Tiara Brown

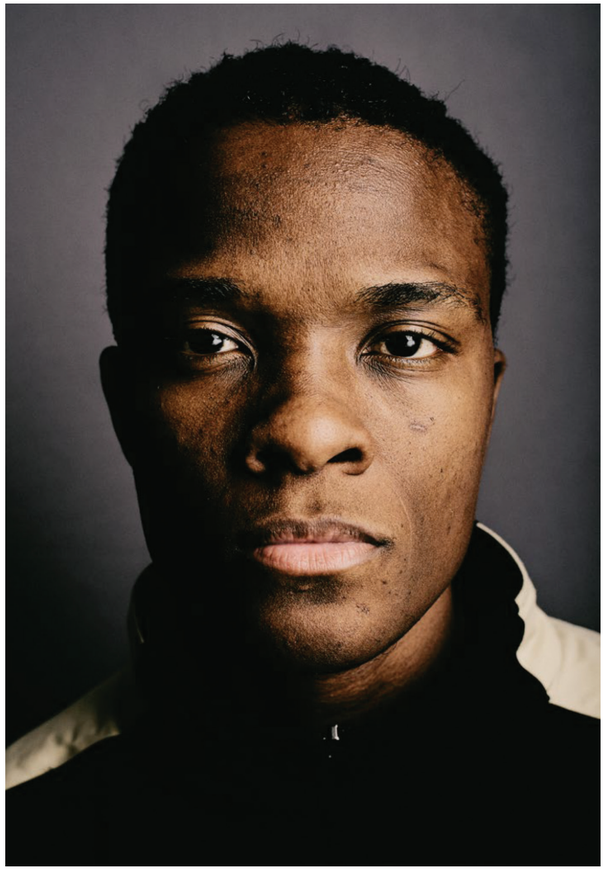
Photographs by Wojtek Urbanek • Text by Thomas Hauser

Very few active fighters have been police officers. A cynic might say that those who served on the front lines of law enforcement have been outnumbered by fighters on the opposite side of the law.

Tunney Hunsaker is the name that first comes to mind when remembering police officers who fought. Hunsaker was the police chief in Fayetteville, West Virginia, when he was tapped as the opponent for Cassius Clay's pro debut. Cumbersome and slow, he lost a six-round decision and, three decades later, told this writer, "I'm honored, highly honored, to have been the first person Muhammad Ali fought in his professional career. The kids here know who Muhammad Ali is, so they know who I am too."

Light heavyweight great Bob Foster (who went up in weight and was knocked out by Ali and Joe Frazier) was a deputy sheriff in Albuquerque late in his ring career. Ricky Frazier was a New York City cop when he was KO'd by Roy Jones. Journeyman Lorenzo Boyd (who suffered stoppages at the hands of Mike Tyson, Tommy Morrison, Trevor Berbick and Tyrell Biggs among his 55 losses) was a police officer in Oklahoma. Philadelphia lightweight Tyrone Crawley and New York City club fighter Tony Gagliardo were also cops. Suffolk County policeman Alex Vargas is currently undefeated in the junior welterweight ranks.

That brings us to Nisa Rodriguez (pictured left) and Tiara Brown (pictured right) – two women who have fought professionally while serving as police officers.



Rodriguez, age 34, spent eight years with the New York City Board of Education as a gym teacher and coach for after-school sports. Three years ago, she transitioned to law enforcement. She now works for the New York City Police Department's Rapid Response Unit, which provides assistance to adolescents whose family members have been the victims of homicide and other serious assaults.

As of this writing, Nisa fights at super middleweight and has a 3-0 (1 KO) ring record. Her husband had some amateur fights when he was young. Tempting fate, they spar together.

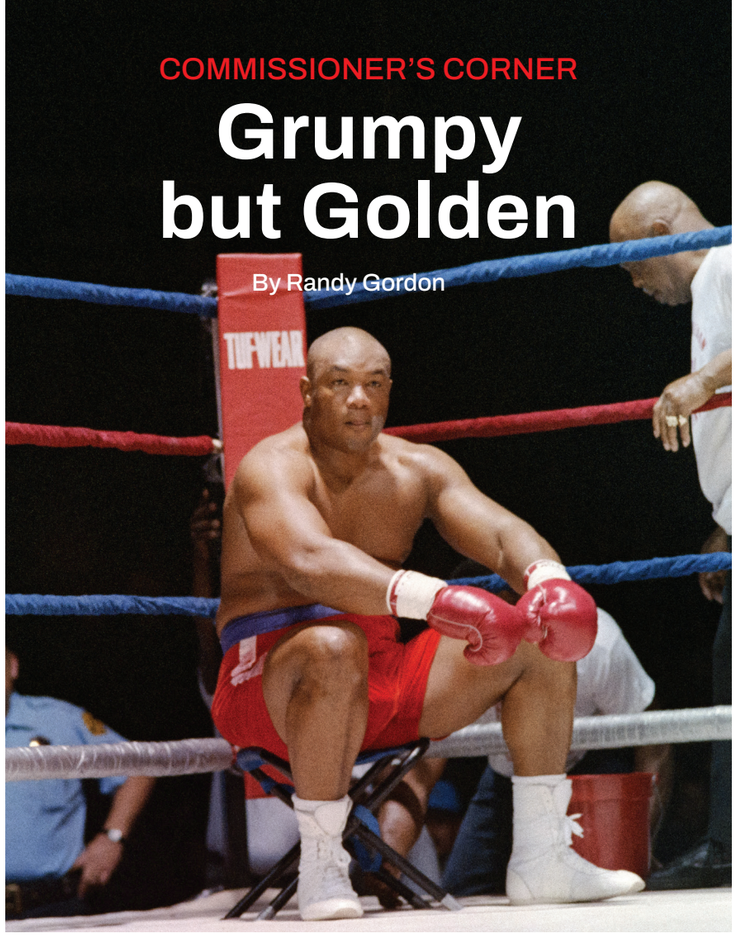
Brown, 36, was a police officer in Washington, D.C., during the early years of her ring career before resigning from the force and moving to Florida, where she joined the Fort Myers Police Department. On March 22, she journeyed to Sydney, Australia, and raised her ledger to 19-0 (11 KOs) when she decisioned Skye Nicolson to claim the WBC featherweight title.

Score one for law enforcement. RING

COMMISSIONER'S CORNER

Grumpy but Golden

By Randy Gordon



Even in repose, Foreman was an intimidating presence in the ring.

I can honestly tell you I didn't like George Foreman.

He was nasty, surly, mean, grumpy, ornery and disrespectful. On a good day, he had the personality of a warthog on a bad day.

It's true.

From the moment he turned pro on June 23, 1969 (beating my friend, Don Waldhelm), right up until he lost to Jimmy Young on March 17, 1977, I didn't like him.

When I heard he was going to retire after losing to Young (only his second loss – the first being to Muhammad Ali), I was thrilled.

"Good riddance!" I thought. "Boxing will be better off without him!"

Foreman walked away and returned to Houston, Texas. I didn't look for him. Neither did boxing.

"That first time around was all an act," Hall of Fame-enshrined announcer and HBO colleague Jim Lampley told me recently. "He got that from his days spent as a teenage sparring partner in the sixties with former heavyweight champ Sonny Liston.

"Liston told George that he shouldn't trust the media, that they are not your friends. He believed Liston. You saw the real George when he came back 10 years after losing to Jimmy Young."

That's when I met him, in "George Foreman: Act II."

At the time, I was working as the USA Network's boxing analyst. I was also working as an announcer for Sylvester Stallone's syndicated boxing show, "Tiger Eye Boxing," and as the blow-by-blow announcer for the Houston Boxing Association (HBA), owned by multimillionaire businesswoman Josephine Abercrombie.

In early March 1985, Ms. Abercrombie called to give me dates for a few upcoming fights. The next one, she informed me, would be on Monday, March 18, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown Houston.

"Right now, you are working by yourself," Ms. Abercrombie told me, "but I am putting something together with the person whom I believe will be your color analyst."

"Who might that be, Ms. Abercrombie?" I asked her.

"I will let you know very soon," she replied. I could tell by her voice it was someone big. I tried to pry the name out of her, but she wouldn't budge.

"Be patient," she said. "I will let you know soon enough."

In the next few days, I received a press packet from the HBA. The packet included a history of the HBA and the HBA East (the New York division of the promotional company), a list of the projected bouts on the card and their associated bios. In the packet, it also said the fight was being taped for national broadcast in dozens of markets by what was then known as SportsChannel. It was mentioned that "blow-by-blow commentary will be provided by Randy Gordon, the former Editor-in-Chief of Ring Magazine and current announcer on the USA Network's weekly boxing series." The release also said "A big-name Color Analyst will be joining Gordon at ringside. The special-guest commentator will be present at a press conference at the Hyatt Regency on Thursday at 11:00 a.m."

I called Ms. Abercrombie one more time to find out who that big name was. She still wasn't budging. "You'll find out very soon," she replied.

The following day, I received a special delivery envelope. In it were my first-class tickets to and from New York's JFK Airport and Houston. The day before leaving, I received a call from Bob Spagnola, the coordinator of boxing for the HBA. We talked about the card. All the while, I was still wondering who it was I'd be working with on the air. Before I could question him, Spagnola asked, "Have you heard who your ringside partner will be?"

"No, I haven't!" I replied. "You guys at the HBA have turned who I'm working with into a tightly-guarded secret. Are you ready to tell me?"

"We are," he replied.

"Go ahead," I said.

"It's …" (he paused for two seconds) "… George Foreman."

"GEORGE FOREMAN!!??" I shouted. "GEORGE FOREMAN!!??"

I was surprised.

I was also a bit angry.

"Great, huh!" said Spagnola.

"Great!" I shot back, masking my disappointment at hearing Foreman's name.

"See you in Houston," said Bob.

I hung up the phone and shook my head.

"George Foreman," I thought. "Big ol' ornery George Foreman. How lucky I am!"

I arrived in Houston shortly after dinner time on Sunday. I checked into the hotel and began calling the rooms of the fighters on the card. The ones I didn't speak to on Sunday, I interviewed at the next morning's weigh-in.

On fight day, Foreman and I were asked by our producer to be at ringside by 6 p.m. Around 1 p.m., I was in my room reviewing the notes I had taken at the weigh-in a few hours earlier. The phone rang.

When I answered, I heard, "Hello, Randy Gordon. This is George Foreman." He sounded cheerful and friendly.

We spoke for a few minutes. Then he asked, "Hey, wanna grab some lunch and go over the show?"

"Sure. What time, George?"

"Now!" he replied.

"Give me 10 minutes," I said.

"OK. Meet me in the coffee shop," he answered.

As I stepped into the hall 10 minutes later, the door directly across from mine opened. It was Foreman. We both laughed. He only knew me from seeing me on the USA Network and ESPN. I knew him because, well, he was George Foreman.

But this was a much larger version of the one I remembered from his days as an up-and-coming contender and as champion. This George Foreman weighed, by his own admission, "at least 350 pounds."

We spent perhaps two hours talking, getting to know each other. He talked about his transformation from being George Foreman the fighter, to being a man of the cloth, the Rev. George Foreman. I felt his honesty. I felt his belief.

Then we went back to our respective rooms. He said he was going to read the Bible. I was going to read my boxing notes.

That night at ringside, we called six fights. One of them matched two slow heavyweights – Dennis Fikes (7-4-1) against Wesley Smith (2-5). During that fight, I watched Foreman more than I watched the two heavyweights. He was sitting there, announcing … and throwing punches at the same time.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I said into the mic, "I wish all of you could see George Foreman as this heavyweight fight goes on. George is throwing punches as if he were in that ring."

I added, "George, I'll bet you could beat BOTH of these guys tonight!"

He responded by saying, "Oh, no, Randy. These guys are young, hungry pros. I am a fat, 36-year-old minister who has been out of the ring for years."

As he said that, I could see a sparkle in his eyes. He was saying one thing. However, I was certain he was thinking of another.

At the end of the show, when we heard "That's a wrap" from our producer, I gave George a hug. He then said, in his Houstonian twang, "Randy, you gave me an idear."

"What kind of idear did I give you, George?" I asked.

He requested my phone number. Remember, it was 1985. None of us had cell phones. I gave him my home number.

"I'll call you tomorrow," he said.

I left on an early morning flight and was home on Long Island before noon.

Around 5 p.m., my phone rang. It was George.

"Remember that idear I said you gave me?"

"I remember," I said.

"Well, today I drove to the local Army base, Fort Sam Houston," Foreman said. "The MPs at the gate recognized me and let me in. I asked if they had a boxing team on the base. They said they did. I asked if they had a base heavyweight champion. They did. They received permission to let me in, then took me to the gym. A few minutes later, the base champion came in. He was around 6-foot-3, 240 pounds. We moved around for three rounds."

"How'd you do?" I asked excitedly.

"I did very well," Foreman told me. "I staggered him once with a jab and once with a right lead."

"How was your stamina?" I inquired.

"Awful," he laughed. "But I'll work on that."

"Work on that? Why will you work on that?" I asked.

"I'm coming back!" said Foreman. "You gave me the idear to come back last night."

We talked for around 15 minutes. He said he needed to lose more than 100 pounds and get back in shape.

He also swore me to secrecy. I said nothing to anybody.

Two years later, Big George Foreman launched the greatest comeback ever.

During the course of his comeback, he sent me several George Foreman grills. He came on the SiriusXM show I co-host with Gerry Cooney on many occasions.

Foreman always laughed when I told him I didn't like him in "George Foreman: Act I."

I didn't like him in "George Foreman: Act II," either.

I loved him!

R.I.P., dear friend.

Carlos Schiebeck

THAILAND

BY WASIM MATHER

The Show Must Go On: Boxing and Chaos in the Land of Smiles

It's been an eventful month in the Land of Smiles. A sudden earthquake on March 28 sent panic through Bangkok and across the country. Life came to a halt as people paused in the face of unexpected adversity. Tragedy struck hardest in neighboring Myanmar, with over 3,000 lives lost. It cast a somber tone over what was already a tense day. In Bangkok, the tremors were a reminder of how quickly everything can change.

This column was originally meant to focus on Thailand's unpredictable boxing matchmaking. But after the March 28 earthquake sent shockwaves through the country – both physically and emotionally – it became clear that uncertainty isn't limited to the ring. Life, like boxing, doesn't always follow a script. Routines were disrupted, events postponed, and for a brief moment, everything paused.

Yet even in the aftermath, boxing carried on. A few shows were delayed, but most pressed forward, as if echoing a mantra ingrained in the culture here: The show must go on. And in a way, that reflects the very heart of boxing in Thailand – not simply unpredictable, but also adaptable and relentless.

When it comes to professional matchmaking in Thailand, it often feels like a lucky draw. It's not uncommon to see a world-ranked fighter stepping into the ring against someone making their pro debut. If you've paid attention, you'll notice many Thai boxers share a common naming structure – fighters like Knockout CP Freshmart or Srisaket Nakornluang Promotion. Their names reflect their gyms or the sponsors that back them, not their family names.

Sathaporn Saart (right, knocking out Indian prospect Dharmender in 2023) was matched up with a 24-1 fighter in his pro debut.

So what does that have to do with matchmaking? Quite a lot. Bigger promotions control television slots, and sponsors want their fighters visible – constantly. This has created a system where some boxers fight as often as once a month, racking up activity and airtime. But boxing isn't just about staying busy – it's a brutal sport. Fighters are paid to perform, but every performance comes with risk. Frequent fights can take a serious toll, especially when development takes a back seat to exposure.

This dynamic often results in fighters with 30 or 40 fights on their record and only a few losses – numbers built through matchmaking that favors experience-building over genuine challenges. Take Anuchai Donsua (17-1, 8 KOs), also known as Anuchai CPF. The 28-year-old Thai bantamweight debuted just three years ago. After fighting for just over two and a half years, Donsua took a record of 16-0 into his bout against IBF titleholder Ryosuke Nishida (9-0, 1 KO at the time), who defended his belt with a seventh-round knockout. The story reflects the rhythm of Thai matchmaking: Keep fighters active, build momentum and then take a leap. Dig into Donsua's record and you'll see a familiar mix – journeymen, debutants and the occasional former title challenger. This kind of matchmaking isn't random – it's strategic. Promoters play the BoxRec star-rating system, building credible-looking resumes by carefully selecting opponents: low risk, high optics. The country's Muay Thai roots provide a deep talent pool of fighters transitioning into pro boxing, often with decades of fight experience behind them. But things don't always go as planned.

After losing to Takuma Inoue in 2018, Tasana Salapat (77-2, 54 KOs), also known as Petch CPF, fell into a well-worn formula: Stack wins, pick up a regional belt and bide time for another world title shot. After finally getting that opportunity and losing to Junto Nakatani last year, Salapat returned with a win over debutant Sarawut Worachaisakul – a typical post-defeat reset.

Sometimes, however, boxing throws a wrench into even the best-laid plans. In 2012, Pongsaklek Wonjongkam (83-4-2, 42 KOs going in) was shocked by Sonny Boy Jaro (34-10-5, 24 KOs at the time) in what was supposed to be a tune-up – proof that in Thailand's professional boxing circuit, even legends aren't immune to upsets.

Fast-forward to last year, and it happened again. Former title challenger Nawaphon Kaikanha (62-4-1, 50 KOs) took on Majid Karimi Poshtiri, an Iranian kickboxer making his pro boxing debut. Kaikanha was expected to coast. But Poshtiri had other plans. He outboxed Kaikanha for four rounds before delivering a brutal knockout in the fifth. Overnight, Poshtiri jumped to No. 96 on BoxRec – a debutant turned ranked contender in one fight. Three months later, Kaikanha traveled to Japan and suffered another defeat – this time to local veteran Mugicha Nakagawa (30-11-3, 19 KOs) in a low-profile bout. While the result didn't make major headlines, it's a sign of where the Thai fighter is in his career: past his peak, still capable, but now stepping into the late chapter where overseas paydays often take priority over title contention.

Poshtiri, on the other hand, quickly became the fighter everyone wanted. He was lined up for a bout with Sathaporn Saart (16-2, 8 KOs) for the WBC Asia featherweight title – until injury struck and the fight was canceled.

Sathaporn was later rescheduled to face South Korea's unbeaten prospect Sang Yeon Kim (6-0, 3 KOs) in late March, a significant step up for the visitor, whose resume had developed through fights that provided steady progression rather than immediate risk. The day of the fight, however, was the very day the quake struck. As

the tremors settled, many were already preparing to head to the venue. At the last moment, with safety in mind, the show was canceled.

Not every fighter struggles in this system. Some rise above it. Take Srisaket Sor Rungvisai (58-6-1, 47 KOs), the former Ring/WBC junior bantamweight champion. Once homeless and fighting just to survive, he lost his first two pro bouts in Japan before being signed by Nakornluang Promotions. He developed under Thailand's matchmaking system and went on to beat Roman Gonzalez twice, shocking the world and becoming one of Thailand's greatest boxing exports.

Then there's Knockout CPF (25-1, 9 KOs), who followed a completely different path. He skipped the traditional buildup entirely, debuting straight into a 10-round WBC youth title fight. He transitioned to 12-rounders soon after that, won the WBA strawweight title and defended it 12 times. His unbeaten run ended in a unification loss to current Ring champion Oscar Collazo (12-0, 9 KOs). Two very different paths. Same destination.

Unpredictable matchmaking, canceled shows, rising stars and aging warriors chasing one last payday – this is boxing in Thailand. Messy, beautiful and resilient to the core.

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

Japan's little giants continue building the national boxing scene. In March, the flyweights took center stage.

On March 13, Kenshiro Teraji unified his WBC 112-pound belt with the WBA version held by the game Seigo Yuri Akui. Teraji, a former unified Ring Magazine 108-pound champ, had to rally hard to score a dramatic stoppage in the final round of the unification bout at Ryogoku Kokugikan, the national sumo arena in Tokyo. The victory not only vaulted Teraji to the No. 1 spot in The Ring's flyweight rankings, but it was also enough for him to crack the magazine's pound-for-pound top 10.

Teraji with the Ring championship belt he earned at 108 pounds.

Jayne Kamin-Oncea

It was impressive enough that Teraji unified titles in a second weight class, but his effort in doing so was also admirable. Teraji and Akui combined to produce an early Fight of the Year candidate, and the win was up for grabs going into the penultimate round, with each fighter leading on one scorecard and tied on the third. It was an unbelievably ruthless but fair battle between the two boxer-punchers – former training partners who had sparred around 20 rounds before Akui won the WBA title against Artem Dalakian in January 2024.

Referee Katsuhiko Nakamura seized the perfect moment to save a hurt and reeling Akui from irrevocable damage before Teraji could land a clean follow-up right to the head. After the exhaustive fight, as an emotionally devastated Akui openly wept, Teraji spoke honestly to the interviewer:

"It was such a tough fight. I might have given in without the team behind me."

It was Akui who forced the busy action from the beginning with great pressure, solid jabs and a straight right that connected with regularity. Many ringsiders were surprised to witness the WBA titleholder fare so well in the biggest fight of his career after admitting that he had been beaten up and disheartened by Teraji during their past sparring sessions. But he started strong and took the momentum away from the more experienced and highly regarded WBC titlist. When Teraji's head trainer, Kenta Kato – the man Teraji calls "my commander" – saw that his boxer was not able to fight his fight in the first half of the bout, the coach let him make a move they explained during the post-fight presser:

"We figured that simple exchanges would not overpower him, so we tried not to square up with Yuri's timing and confused him with more complex combinations."

Akui was still in top gear going into the late rounds, but he had already absorbed a lot of punches, especially Teraji's right hook, which had caused severe swelling around his left eye by the 11th round. On the other hand, Teraji's face suggested that he had fuel in reserve for the final frame.

"I just want to say Yuri was strong," Teraji said during the post-fight press conference. "I was a little upset by his resolution to come forward at first. I was not sure about who was winning on points [by the late rounds]. So I am proud of myself for giving it all that I had in the final round to finish it when the time came. This win taught me that sparring and fighting are totally different. Boxing is never easy."

Akui had to go straight to a hospital after the fight, holding his thoughts until a presser the following day.

"Kenshiro had been the best fighter I ever faced [in the gym], and he still is after everything," said Akui, a father whose third child is due in June. "I prepared 100% for him, and I gave it 100% in the ring to overcome him, but I was not good enough to maintain it until the end. I have no objection to the referee's decision, as actually I was getting hit even though I was still determined to hit harder. I am glad that my family saw me walk out the ring on my own feet. I must thank the ref for that."

★ ★ ★

Just two weeks later, Japan gained a new flyweight world titleholder when Masamichi Yabuki, the reigning IBF 108-pound beltholder at the time, scored another final-round stoppage to lift the IBF 112-pound belt from Angel Ayala at Sky Expo in Tokoname on March 29.

Yabuki had a great start, knocking Ayala down with a left hook at the end of the first round. The lanky puncher dropped the Mexican again with a right hand in the second frame. A head clash in the third round caused severe bleeding from cuts on both fighters – one on Yabuki's right cheek and one between Ayala's eyebrows – and made the fight a little complicated (if not a bit wild), but the two-time junior flyweight titleholder kept it one-sided with the cleaner shots. The referee halted the contest not long after Ayala got up from another bad knockdown (courtesy of Yabuki's big right hand) in the 12th round.

"It was a tough fight, as I expected," said Yabuki, who proudly displayed IBF belts on both shoulders during the post-fight interview. "I had to be very careful when I got inside, because the champion had hard punches."

Yabuki had to get through a lot of setbacks – including losses to Nakatani (2016) and Akui (2018) in the early stages of his career – before coming into his own with upset victories over Teraji (for the WBC 108-pound title in 2022) and Sivenathi Nontshinga (for the IBF junior flyweight belt in 2024). Between the first Teraji victory and the Nontshinga win, he had to bounce back from a rematch loss (via stoppage) to Teraji and an Achilles tendon rupture (in 2023). He now encourages his younger brother, Masanori Rikiishi, who's scheduled to fight Eduardo Nunez for the vacant IBF 130-pound title in Yokohama on May 28. It's the brothers' dream to be world titleholders simultaneously.

★ ★ ★

On the last day of March, the Japan Boxing Commission's 2024 Awards Ceremony was held in Tokyo, where Teraji and Akui had a chance to reunite and talk.

"I thanked him for the great fight," Teraji told the press after the ceremony. "Now we are closer friends, or comrades. And we'll have sparring again when we have a chance."

Teraji also expressed pride in being the third Japanese boxer to be ranked in The Ring's pound-for-pound top 10 (at No. 10), behind Naoya Inoue and Junto Nakatani.

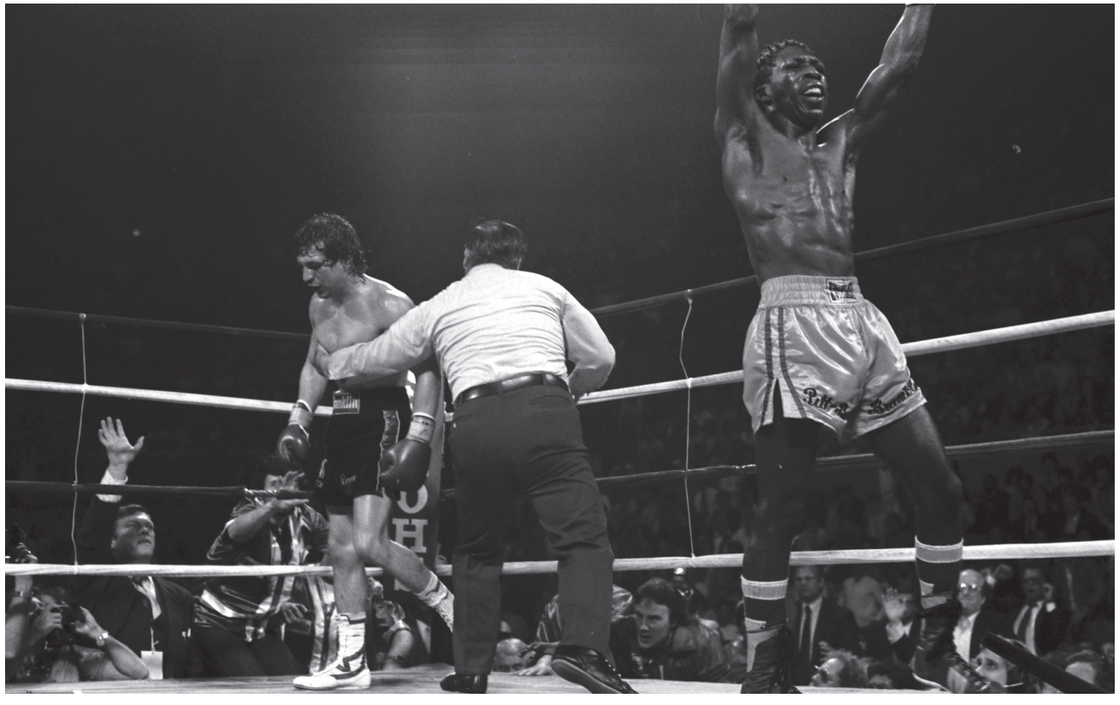
"I am very happy and honored," said Teraji, who brought up future opponents that could possibly advance him in the pound-for-pound rankings. "That gave me a new motivation to do my best to go higher in the list."

He dismissed the goal of becoming the undisputed flyweight champion on the grounds that he's already fought the other 112-pound titleholders – Yabuki and WBO beltholder Anthony Olascuaga, whom he stopped in nine rounds in a defense of the unified Ring 108-pound championship in 2023.

"The fights I want are in the 115-pound division," said Teraji, who publicly called for a challenge to Ring/WBC junior bantamweight champ Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez, who resides four spots ahead of Teraji (at No. 6) in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings.

It's a totally healthy and ideal ambition for the new pound-for-pound player to call for the biggest money fight with a fellow elite fighter. And that's always what boxing fans are starving for.

BOOM BOOM BRAMBLE:
On June 1, 1984, Livingstone Bramble shocked the boxing world by scoring a brutal 14th-round TKO over the super-popular Ray Mancini to lift the WBA lightweight crown in Buffalo, New York. Bramble, a prohibitive 4-to-1 underdog, fought brilliantly throughout, outboxing Mancini at length and more than matching the champion on the inside. After wobbling Mancini badly at the end of the 13th round, Bramble went through the gears in the penultimate stanza, battering the game champion all over the ring before referee Marty Denkin halted the action. Inexplicably, two judges had Bramble behind at the time of the stoppage, while the third – and only sensible – official had him comfortably ahead. Mancini was making the fifth defense of the title he won from Art Frias in May 1982. RING



FIGHTLINE

Fights only last a matter of minutes, but fighters are connected to each other by chains that extend for decades – even centuries – into the past. Their bond is a lineage built face-to-face: A young prospect struggles with the skills of an aging veteran whose nose was once broken by a fighter now enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. In that way, muscle memory carries knowledge and boxers face a piece of everyone their opponent has fought, everyone those people fought, and so on.

This month we're linking two of the biggest attractions ever to emerge from the proud boxing nation of Mexico – Ruben Olivares and Canelo Alvarez.

Olivares, who was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1991, is one of the greatest bantamweights of all time. "El Puas" was a phenomenal boxer-puncher who began his pro career with a 62-bout unbeaten streak (61-0-1, 57 KOs). Olivares' fan-friendly style, happy-go-lucky personality, willingness to face the best of his era (1960s/'70s), and his rivalries with Chucho Castillo, Rafael Herrera and Bobby Chacon, earned him unparalleled popularity in Mexico and Southern California, where he routinely packed The Forum in Inglewood.

Alvarez, a four-division champ, has been the face of boxing since the close of the Mayweather/Pacquiao era 10 years ago. The two-time Ring Magazine Fighter of the Year is the only North American boxer capable of filling stadiums, which he's done five times in Texas and once in Zapopan (near his native Guadalajara). He will do so again – in Las Vegas – when he takes on the challenge of fellow future Hall of Famer Terence Crawford in September.

There are multiple paths linking the Mexican superstars, whose primes are separated by 50 years, but we found this four-boxer Fightline. Can you find a faster route?

If so, or if you have another Fightline you'd like to submit, send it to comeoutwriting@gmail.com. And remember, some fighters can be linked on paper by jumping forward and backward in time, but to be a true lineage the fights must come in chronological order.

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